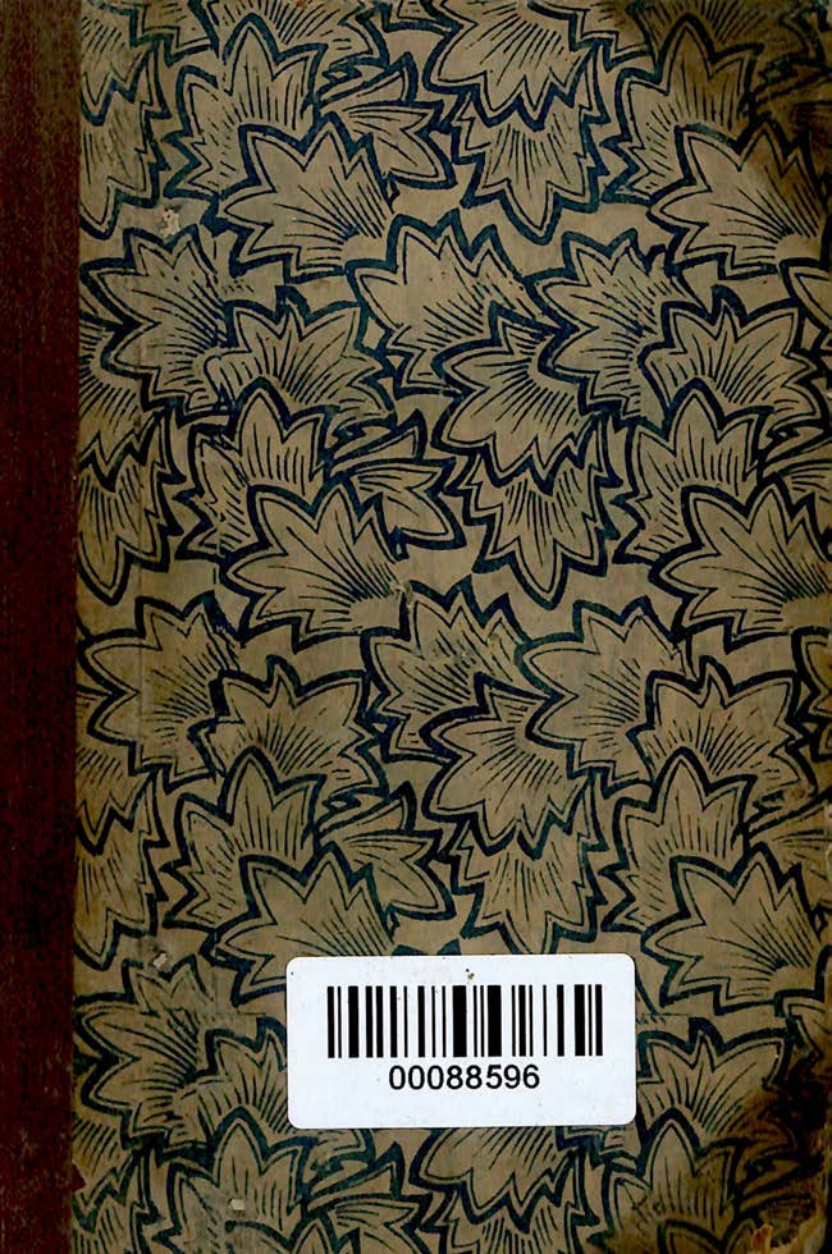
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# DOMESTIC SKETCHES IN RU.

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BY

LADY CHARLOTTE PEPYS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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# DOMESTIC SKETCHES IN RUSSIA.

## CHAPTER I.

Let us now return to our children and their preceptress.

One evening, when it was too wet to take the usual drive or ramble, the little girls gathered round Madame Beretti and begged her to tell them a story.

"Have you prepared your lessons for to-morrow?" said she.

"Yes," answered Vera and Aimée.

"And you, Nadine?"

"Yes. No, I have that horrible, abominable geography to learn!—the course of the Danube. What a bore! How I do hate geography!"

"Have you ever seen the Danube?" said Madame Bereti, without noticing the last vehemently expressed sentiment.

"Oh, no, we have never been out of Russia."

"I thought perhaps you might as it is one of the principal roads to and from Russia. Would you like to learn something about it?"

"Oh, yes, do tell us about it! Did you come that way?" cried Aimée.

"You were going to tell us on day," said Nadine, "all about your fi visit to Russia; will you now?"

"Yes, if you learn your lesson be supper. I will, as soon as you

learnt it, begin my story, so as to have time for it before Aimée goes to bed."

"Thank you! thank you!" cried all the children, and Nadine quickly took out her geography book and Atlas, and applied herself to her task. Being very quick, the three pages were soon conquered: she then came smiling to Madame Bereti, and claimed her promise.

"Leave the Atlas on the desk," was the reply, for we shall want it presently. The children thereupon settled themselves comfortably round the table, and the narrator thus began:—

"I was staying at Vichy many years ago, when I was disturbed, one night, by hearing voices in animated talk outside my door. I could not make out what was the language spoken. It

seemed to me more liquid even than Italian, more vigorous than German, more majestic than Spanish. Its sound reminded me of the Greek Testament, as read by my brothers in their school-days. There was no use in listening; for I could not understand what the speakers were talking about, or what was the matter; so I was obliged to content myself with determining to inquire all about the unusual confabulation the next day. Accordingly, in the morning, I lost no time in questioning the master of the hotel, and heard that a Russian family had been reinforced by the arrival of several of its members, for whom it was difficult to find room, and this had caused the talking I had heard. So this, then, was Russian, thought I; and determined that, as soon as I pos-

sibly could, I would go to the country and learn a language so strikingly harmonious."

"And did you do so directly?" asked Aimée.

"No; I was engaged then in a very pleasant labour, which I had no desire to quit, and afterwards Russia was at war. It was not easy either to find anyone going there. As soon as peace was proclaimed, however, I began to look forward to this long-desired project, and at last made acquaintance with a charming Russian family, just returning home after a visit to Paris and Homburg. I agreed to go with them, and joined them at Frankfort, and we proceeded together to Dresden. This was my first experience of travelling with people of your nation, who are sup-

posed to be the best travellers in the world."

"And how did you like it?" said Vera.

"I liked it much. They were very kind to me, and made me feel quite at home, by being entirely so themselves in presence of a stranger. They took off their hats, put on their nightcaps, and settled themselves to sleep very comfortably; for it was quite late when we started. They were rather disturbed, to be sure, by our arrival at Leipzic; for there we had all to turn out, at five in the morning, and cross the town to another station. We shortly afterwards reached Dresden. Have you ever seen Dresden? No, I forgot you have never left Russia. Shall I tell you about it now, or when I have finished my story?"

"Now," cried Nadine.

"Afterwards, please," said Vera.

"After the story," said Aimée.

"The majority has it," said Madame Bereti, "so I will only just mention that we went to the gallery, where I met with an old friend, and by stopping to speak to her lost my party, and only found them at the station, where they were drawn up in an awful line before the door, looking out for me. They thought I should be alarmed if I had to travel alone by the next train, and were, therefore, very anxious to see me arrive, which was very kind of them; and they had no intention of reproaching me—unless, indeed, I disarmed them by my apologies. We still had some time to wait for the train, and then passed through that lovely country which is

watered by the Elbe and the Moldau, and is called Saxon Switzerland. It lies between Dresden and Lobositz. We saw it just as the day was closing in, and passed through Prague in the night; much to my vexation, we did not stop there, for in that city there is a great deal to be seen. However, on we travelled all through the night, and at daybreak saw the Carpathian mountains in the distance."

"I know!—I know!" cried Nadine, interrupting her eagerly.

"I daresay you do now," said Madame Bereti. "It was broad hot sunlight when we crossed over the many arms of the Danube, and arrived at Vienna, where, after some delay at the custom-house, we were allowed to start for our hotel. Through the red tower gate, Rothen-

thurmer Pforte, through the narrow streets—which are said to have been built so narrow for the purpose of excluding the heat—and passing the beautiful cathedral of San Stefan, we drove into the Kärnthner Strasse, and turned into the court-yard of the Archduke Charles Hotel, where we took up our abode for a week. During this time I paid frequent visits to the magnificent cathedral, the gay Graben, and the dreary Prater, besides taking many rambles on the ramparts. Shall I tell you about these little excursions now, or will you wait till I have finished my narrative?"

"We will wait," cried Vera and Nadine.

"Now!" cried Aimée.

"The majority has it again," said Madame Bereti.

"After spending a week in Vienna, we found ourselves one Sunday evening on the little Wiener Donnau, the branch of the Danube on which the city stands; it was a very wet day, and the steamer was small and inconvenient, but that did not much signify, for as soon as we reached the main stream we had to change to one a little larger, but equally uncomfortable, all the centre of the deck being filled up with the roof of the cabin, but I do not suppose people ever slept on board. Again we changed to a boat a little larger, and better arranged, but where it would have been still difficult to pass the night; we were, however, only asked to dine there, and before night left

the pretty 'Eberdorf' for the majestic 'Karl Josef,' which we found waiting for us at Pesth. We had passed by Presbourg without being able to stop. It was at this place that Maria Theresa was crowned. I daresay you remember the story of her requesting at the banquet to have her crown lifted off her head, on account of the heat, when her beautiful hair immediately fell in clustering curls upon her shoulders, and the Hungarian nobles drew their swords, and exclaimed, 'We will die for our king, Maria Theresa!'"

"Why did they say king?" said Aimée.

"Why, don't you know?" said Nadine, hastily; "they have no word for queen," added she, more gently.

Aimée coloured very much.

Madame Bereti looked at them both, but said nothing.

Vera, to turn attention away from them, asked,

"Is the Danube very beautiful at Presbourg?"

"No, it is merely a winding expanse of water until one reaches Gran, where it is shut in by high mountains, and looks more like a lake than a stream. But I must return to where I left off. A little way down the river stands the hill of Konigsberg, whereon every newly-crowned king of Hungary must ride on horseback, and from its summit make the sign of the cross in the air with the sword of St. Stephen, waving the blade towards the four points of the compass, in token of his intention to protect the land on all sides. I should

very much like to witness that ceremony. The sword used on the occasion is the same sword that Maria Theresa wore when she received the Hungarian crown, and addressed her new subjects in a Latin speech, wherein she told them how beset she was by enemies on all sides, and threw herself on their heroism and fidelity to maintain her cause and her rights. She was dressed, on this grand solemnity, in deep mourning, after the Hungarian fashion, and had, some authors affirm, her little son Joseph in her arms. I am not sure that this last assertion is true, but she certainly excited, in the highest degree, the sympathy and enthusiastic loyalty of the natives of Hungary."

"Have you ever seen a picture of Maria Theresa?" asked Nadine; "grand-

papa has one—such a beauty!—and I never understood its expression till now; but she has no child with her, only a little page lifting the crown from her head, and such beautiful hair falling all about her. And the men, the nobles I mean, are so handsome! Are the Hungarians very handsome?"

"They are. They have splendid eyes, a fine manly cast of features, and their figures shew great strength and agility, arising partly from their education."

"How do you mean?" asked Nadine. "I thought education meant history and geography, and things like that."

"No, no," said Vera, "I knew that education meant more than that, but how can it affect one's figure?"

"Education," said Madame Bereti,

"consists in forming the individual man, woman, or child, in mind and body, so as to enable him to perform what he will most probably have to do. You see, then, that the very pursuits that are lessons to one may perhaps be amusements to another. I remember being very much struck with this when I went with your sister to the Ecole Theatrale, in St. Petersburgh. Which is to you the most amusing—a dancing lesson, or one of geography?"

"Oh, a dancing lesson!" they all replied.

"And yet I suppose you think it, for that very reason, a less grave and necessary part of your daily employments?"

They all looked rather puzzled at this, but replied that they supposed grown-

up people would think so; and this was perhaps quite as much as could be expected of them, for dancing is with almost all of their nation a perfect passion.

Madame Bereti went on therefore:

"Yes, of course they would, because in your case the one occupation is for information, and the other for amusement; but at the school I speak of, though the little pupils all looked very happy and cheerful whilst at their dancing lesson, yet it was their third that day; and one or two to whom we spoke seemed to care much more for their other lessons, for which a much more limited time was assigned. Dancing was to these little persons one of their most important studies, as they had to earn their living by it. And in the same way

out-of-door sports, which are in some families and some nations left entirely to the taste of the individual to follow or neglect, are in others insisted upon quite as strenuously as classics, mathematics, or any other branch of instruction. They were so, and I believe still are, in Hungary. They are, too, thought a great deal of in most parts of Russia, and in general among all people who prize warlike accomplishments above all others."

At this moment Vacili entering with the supper tray, Vera asked him to wait a moment while she wrote a note. This was, as she informed Madame Bereti, to ask her music-master whether he was coming to-morrow, as it was a *fête* day.

Madame Bereti remarked that it was

quite unnecessary to keep that feast, yet that the note might be sent. Vera, however, was quite sure that it had been always strictly observed, and she had been unfortunately too long used to be an authority on such subjects to be now willing to submit to the judgment of another.

It may seem surprising that, under the severe rule of Miss Rodney, such should have been the case; but Miss Rodney, like many other despots, was ignorant—therefore, frequently insisted in the wrong place, and so lost her power when she might have legitimately used it.

Madame Bereti, on the contrary, was well accustomed to the habits of Russian houses, and never attempted to introduce any practice at variance with them. She

knew very well that the feast of the morrow was not one that required any observance, except attendance on the church service; but she did not interfere with Vera's writing her note, being quite resolved upon her own course of action.

The note being dispatched, the party gathered round the table to enjoy a dainty little supper of poached eggs, here called omelette, and varinki, flanked by large baskets of fruit.

Over this repast they sat so long pleasantly chatting, that it was past Aimée's bed-time when they separated, Madame Bereti promising to finish her story the next evening.

On the morning following, the usual party being assembled in the school-room, the lessons learnt by heart were first called for by the governess. Vera

repeated hers, as usual, very correctly; but when Madame Bereti was going to mark the next lesson, she stopped her by the information that it should be for the day after, as that day was a holiday.

Rather amused by this demonstration on the part of Vera, her schoolmistress merely quietly assured her that she was mistaken, and called Nadine to repeat her lesson also. Afterwards came Aimée's turn. She blushed, stammered, and tried to get through one or two sentences, but all in vain; it was too evident that she had not even attempted to learn her task.

Being accused of this, she said, "I forgot to remind you that that is not my lesson. Let me show it you—it is here." And she began glibly to repeat three pages back.

"This is an old lesson, Aimée," said Madame Bèreti.

"Yes," said the little girl, composedly, "it is."

"Then why do you bring it to me?"

"You know you told me that I was to begin this chapter over again."

"True, Aimée, but when you had finished it. You have still two pages to learn, which you ought to have repeated to-day. You must, therefore, write out your lesson this afternoon, and repeat it before supper; and the next time you are guilty of this fault, the lesson shall be doubled. As for the falsehoods you have told, they require a severer punishment. A person who cannot speak the truth is guilty before God, and must not expect his fellow-creatures to believe him, or to have any pleasure in his society.

I, therefore, condemn you to the solitude of your own room for three days, and I forbid Vera and Nadine to visit you. It is not very long since I had to punish you for this same fault."

This sentence made Vera and Nadine look very unhappy. Aimée prepared sulkily to withdraw, and Madame Bereti, rising from her seat, took her by the hand and led her away: she preferred speaking seriously to her in private. She had, however, scarcely begun when she heard discordant sounds in the school-room, which induced her to leave Aimée and return to her sisters. She found Nadine seated on the long desk, looking extremely excited, with a ruler in her hand, which she was flourishing about in all directions. Madame Bereti immediately saw that there

was rebellion in the camp. Vera and Nadine were both speaking loudly. Without, however, appearing to observe their heightened colour and raised voices she quietly desired them to put on their cloaks and go to church.

"Is not Aimée to go?" asked Nadine.

"Leave that to me," said her governess.

"It is very wrong!" said Nadine.

"I am afraid papa will be displeased," said Vera, drawing herself up.

"My dear children," said Madame Bereti, "you need not distress yourselves about it—I understand what is to be done for Aimée's good, and I am quite sure the General desires that, above all things. Go now to church."

Awed into their usual obedience by

the quiet authority of her manner, the girls said no more. Madame Bereti then went to Aimée, put on her cloak without speaking to her, took her to church, kept her by her side near the door, and did not allow her to join her sisters. When service was over she, however, took her up to the General, to kiss his hand as usual.

"What is the matter?" said he; "have you been naughty this morning? What have you been doing?"

"I did not know my lessons, papa," said she.

"And told stories about them, eh?—that is your way, I am afraid. Very well, next time that happens, Madame Bereti, just send her to me, if you please—in fact, perhaps she had better come now, shall she?"

"Oh, no, please, papa!—please, papa!" said Aimée; "I won't tell any more stories, and I will do all my lessons very well!"

"Mind you do, then, ungrateful child, beginning all your old ways again with a person so good to you. It shows that kindness has no effect. You ought to have Miss Rodney back again; and if it were not for Nadine and Vera, who deserve to be made happier, I would send for her."

"Indeed, mon General," said Madame Bereti, smiling, "I hope for my sake also that you will not do so, for I should be very sorry to leave your little girls now."

He laughed, and replied,

"For all our sakes I should be sorry to do that, and therefore if Aimée will

not be good with you we must try how she likes the rule of the rod."

"I should like to come and speak to you privately, if it is not inconvenient, as soon as I have taken Aimée home."

"By all means," said he, "I will wait for you in the saloon."

When, therefore, Aimée was safely imprisoned, Vera and Nadine seated at their lessons, with orders not to move till Madame Bereti's return, she went to the General to ask his opinion about the fête-day, and moreover to try and enlighten him a little as to the system she was pursuing, and her reasons for preferring it to what he called the rule of the rod.

Her efforts, however, in this respect were vain—the General had never seen anything succeed but despotic and abso-

lute rule, supported by coercion. His own character, it is true, was kind, but it was a point of belief with him that a man was well served and well obeyed in proportion only to the fear he inspired; and that he himself would find his affairs and the education of his children prosper all the better if, as he said, he did not spoil both by being too merciful. To the merits of a preventive system, of help and encouragements, hopeful and loving influences, awakening the sense of dignity and responsibility towards God and towards man, he was quite blind. All Madame Bereti's pleadings with him on this subject fell upon an impervious ear.

He thanked her, however, and expressed implicit confidence in her and her system; but when she ventured to

observe that it was not likely to succeed if continually thwarted by one of severity, he appeared to think she was far beyond her depth; and hopeless of securing anything like co-operation, she withdrew, satisfied at least with the list she procured of the fête-days to be commemorated before Easter.

It may here be observed, that very great difference exists in Russia as to the way church holidays are commemorated in various families: for though none can pretend to keep all, some scarcely attend to any but the great universal feasts, while others think it important to carry out the distinctions of fasts and feasts into their daily life as nearly as possible, and make their children do the same from their earliest years.

Armed with the document just spoken of, Madame Bereti returned to the school-room; so, calling Vera and Nadine, she made them each take a sheet of paper and write from her dictation the list of solemn days to be observed in the family.

"Now," said she, "you will always know what days are and what days are not to be treated as holidays. You see the General's list includes the household fête-days, so that there will be no difficulty. And," she added, smiling, "if anything very interesting should occur on any other day it will be easy to add it to the list. You see to-day is not marked."

Vera looked at Nadine, and Nadine at Vera—then Vera rose from her seat, approached her governess, and said timidly,

"Will you kiss me and forgive me?"

"What for?" said Madame Bereti—"for having made a mistake?"

"No," said Vera, "but for having persisted in it, and for having written to old Solfa."

Vera's eyes were full of tears, and on Madame Bereti's embracing her she returned the caress warmly, and sobbed out,

"I can't think how I could have done such a thing!"

Nadine exclaimed, "Nor I either," and came crying for a kiss also.

When they were both a little composed they asked if Aimée might be pardoned also. Madame Bereti calmly replied that her case was quite different; that she had been guilty of a fault

which would only be strengthened by any success.

"Success?—I do not understand," said Nadine. "Aimée has not got what she wanted."

"Yes, she has partly; that is to say, she heard the story last night, without having to learn her lessons last night, as you did. And if she were now to escape with a slight punishment, she would be tempted to try the same kind of thing again; and I always wish to diminish temptations for my children. I wish them to discover that deceptions do not answer for other faults—I address myself to higher principles; but people who are false have no high principles to address."

"I don't think," said Vera, hesitatingly, "that that is quite a common

opinion, at least here—perhaps it is in England?"

"Yes," said Madame Bereti, "it certainly is in England. Truth is in that country considered the first quality necessary to everyone; and the greatest insult that can be offered to an English man, woman, or child, is that of questioning his or her veracity."

"Do you mean," said Nadine, "that children never say, 'You lie,' to one another? We often do."

"Certainly not," said Madame Bereti. "I hope you will henceforth be able to say, 'As we used to do;' for it is very important to you to consider each other's truth as sacred, and to be slow to suspect anyone of deceit or falsehood. I hear you sometimes say to your maid Xivrea, 'You lie!'"

"Oh, to the servants!" said Nadine; "everybody does it—don't they in your country?"

"They would get no servants to stay with them if they did," was the reply. "It may sometimes happen that a very old or faithful servant may care enough for his master and his family to endure such an insult patiently, but such a case is rare. Generally a domestic, on being so outraged, would leave directly."

"Ours can't leave," said Nadine.

"I know," said Madame Bereti; "and I should have thought—"

She paused.

"What should you have thought?" said Vera eagerly; "do tell us."

"I should have thought that consideration would have been a double reason

to a generous nature for treating dependants well. I know one Russian lady who acts upon this principle."

"Who is it?" asked Nadine; "do we know her?"

"I think you do—she lives now at Petersburg."

"It is Hélène!" they both exclaimed.

"Yes," replied Madame Bereti, "I was very much struck with her manner to all her dependants; and she told me that she could trust them almost all perfectly—"

"I don't wonder at that," said Nadine. "Hélène's servants always are better than other people's; I don't think they do behave so like rogues and liars to her."

"Gently, gently," cried Madame Bereti; "you call your nation rogues and liars!"

"I am afraid," said Vera, "that they

are liars—at least every one says so; and some travellers have even been so stupid as to confound the nobility with the people, and say that truth is unknown in Russia! Only think of that!"

"I know it," said Madame Bereti gravely, "and that is a strong, though only secondary, reason with me for refusing your request about Aimée, and for urging you to be very watchful over yourselves in this particular. You should, as Christians and as Russians, for the honour of your country, scorn everything dishonourable."

"We will indeed," said both the girls, moved by her earnestness.

They then resumed the business of the day, and Madame Bereti was pleased to observe that her words seemed to have taken effect; for some time, at least, a

higher tone of honour, and a gentler manner with the servants, prevailed in the little community.

The General and his children were now nearly alone; visitors certainly dropped in every now and then, but as the weather grew colder they only appeared for one day and then vanished. This gave Madame Bereti plenty of time to carry out her plans, and to become fondly beloved by the little subjects of her gentle rule.

Vera was at present just sixteen, and was becoming rapidly a very well-informed and agreeable companion; Nadine, eager and affectionate as ever, was learning to act upon principle; and Aimée, under a constantly watchful eye, was losing many of her childish faults, and acquiring, though still disingenuous, habits of obedience and order.

## CHAPTER II.

"HERE is another of these long dull evenings," said Nadine, rather fretfully, at the end of a day of "chasse-neige," which they had spent entirely in the house; "and we have all been so good, Madame Bereti!"

"Have you?" was the reply; "and am I to guess what that means? Well, get your work or drawing, and ask for candles."

Nadine clapped her hands. Xivrea entered with a look of delight, and having guessed what was wanted, brought in four

lighted candles. "Svetchi ne pravda li, Nadejda Nicolaievna?"* said she, shewing —a true Russian beauty—her faultless teeth, in a wide smile.

"Shall I tell you a story my other little Russian friends were very fond of, and which I told them partly on the Danube?"

"Oh! yes, do; but you have not finished the journey. Can you tell us both to-night?"

"I think so, the journey is nearly finished.

"When we left Pesth, we floated rapidly down the fine broad river; but the scenery was less beautiful than it had been. The flat land on each side forms what is called the basin of the Danube, and Theiss the famous—"

* "Candles—is it not so, Miss Nadine?"

"River of Hungary!" exclaimed Nadine.

"The plain is almost as wide and grassy, and as fertile, as the Pampas, in——"

"I don't know where," said Nadine and Aimée together.

"In South America," said Vera. "But are there any wild herds of buffalos and horses?"

"No; there are none of them in Europe; but there are enormous flocks of sheep.

"When Prince E——, an Hungarian nobleman, was staying with the Duke of B——, in England, who has a very large farm completely stocked, he was asked how many sheep he had.

"'I am not sure,' said he, 'but I know I have fifteen hundred shepherds.'

The immense plains on which their flocks graze may indeed supply many flocks with abundant pasture.

"The river which here intersects these plains is often divided by islands, and though its channel is very wide it is not often very full. When I saw it it was somewhat low, but in the spring, after the winter snows and rains have swollen all the streams that pour into its channel, it must be a very grand expanse of water. I remember we were all rather sad on leaving Pesth. Its wide plains, with their flocks of water-fowl, the receding hills, and the quiet grey sky above us, all seemed so peaceful that I felt no inclination for change. I suppose my friends were sensible of the same sort of feeling, for when we rose next morning, and had finished the

first of the many repasts that amuse one on a river boat, they asked me to tell them a story, and I begun *Le petit Capuchin Noir*, which you shall hear presently. Thick black looking forests on the right, and after this the chain of the Fruskagora hills (not marked on the map, Aimée) afforded us, as we proceeded, some fine views, and, I may add, fine walks; for the water was so shallow, that we ran aground on a sand-bank; and having to wait for a smaller steamer to take us on, we landed and took a stroll. At Semlin we were obliged to submit to severe regulations enforced against the inroads of the plague, which is often brought there by travellers from Turkey. Even when quite well, no one is allowed to cross to Belgrade, which is just opposite, unless accompanied by a

quarantine officer, and he must then return before sunset. "But do you know what a quarantine is?"

"Oh, yes," cried Nadine, "the stupidest thing possible — I wonder who invented it. Vera had some sort of fever once, and we were kept away from her for weeks, just when she wanted us most. Last year I had only just a few spots, having nothing the matter with me, and was not allowed to see anyone but Miss Rodney for a month! But people never have the plague now, have they?"

"Oh, yes, indeed they have, in Egypt and in Turkey, I am sorry to say. Well, we reached Semlin in the morning, and only waited to disembark nine passengers going to Constantinople; then we went steaming and splashing down the

river to Moldova, where we had to take a smaller steamer. The Carpathian mountains were much nearer to us now, and we were in the midst of very grand scenery. There was no story-telling on this day, for the landscape from Moldova to Drenkova was so beautiful and interesting that it engaged all our attention. The water was, however, so low that we had to pass the Iron Gates in a carriage."

"What are the Iron Gates?"

"Islands of rock, that are like huge bars across the river—they look as if they had been placed there on purpose to bar the way, and that is why the Turks call them Demir Kassi. The mountains on each side are really not so grand here as they were before, and I must go back a little and tell you how

capriciously the river frets and foams over the rocks at Moldova, then spreads out wide again, is once more contracted, and rushes past Drenkova, and there, suddenly sweeping round the Greben rock, becomes quite calm, and like a beautiful lake—how beautiful I cannot describe; after this it is again pent up among the rocks, and finds its way through the very grand defile of Kazan—a finer sight than any we had yet seen—to Orsova, where we had to take to our carriages, as I before told you.

"A great many curious Roman remains have been found here. You know that the Romans possessed this country for some time, and their great works may still be seen in the traces of a splendid road, cut along the very face of these rocks, in the ruins of Trojan's Bidge

below Gladova, and in the remains of the fortress of Golumbacz, which was constructed by an empress you know something of."

"The Empress Helena, who discovered the true Cross?"

"Yes, the same.

"We were now between the principalities of Wallachia—you know its old name Dacia—and Servia. There were several Wallachian families on board, and they said the peasants prided themselves on being Romans, whereas they themselves were proud of their Sclavonic blood. I thought of the poor Dying Gladiator — Vera; you know he was a Dacian, and the true barbarians were those who sentenced him to be——"

"Butchered, to make a Roman holiday," said Vera, promptly.

"Well, my dear children, I have not described these scenes very minutely, but we spent six days and nights very pleasantly on board different steamers. After passing the ruins of Trajan's Bidge, we were glad to leave the little steamer that had taken us up below the Iron Gates, and to find the beautiful 'Albrecht' ready for us; we had an excellent cabin on deck, and as there were to be no more changes before we arrived at Galatz, we made ourselves comfortable. The sand-banks were so numerous in this part of the river that we could not advance during the night, so that our arrival at Galatz was much retarded.

"We were all sorry to quit the 'Albrecht' to sleep on board the 'Metternich,' that was to take us to Odessa. However, we wished to proceed thither

that night, and were much disappointed at finding ourselves still at Galatz next morning. We dropped, during the day, down the narrow Sulina channel, and at five o'clock darted out upon the darkening but beautiful sea. The weather was very fine, and all the party had beds on deck, where we walked and talked for some time, till the wind got up, and thunder began to roll in the distance, which threatened those who were lying down on deck with an unquiet night. A storm of rain soon came pouring down upon them, and they hurried into their cabins. As I was passing along the vessel to get to mine, a soft little voice said to me, in Italian,

"'Don't be frightened, lady—don't be frightened!'

"'Why should I be frightened, little one?'

"'Oh! at the storm, lady—but don't be frightened!'

"'No, my little fellow—I have travelled too much to be afraid of such a storm as this!'

"'Oh! but I am, I am, lady—so frightened!'

"It was the little cabin-boy. I stilled his fears by telling him God was ever with us; but he looked much happier next morning when it was all over, and we were safe and well, anchored off Odessa. While we were living in that city, that is, after our arrival at the home of my friends, I continued and finished the story I will now tell you.

## CHAPTER III.

"A YEAR or two ago, when the little town of Hyères, in the south of France, was less visited than it is now, and is likely to be henceforward, visitors and strangers were more remarked than they are in places of more importance, and the townspeople generally knew where anyone lived who frequented the little market-place on the hill. There was one individual, however, who baffled every one's curiosity. She certainly had been seen to go into the room of a poor old woman who lived near; but, when

questioned about it, the old dame said that her visits were only visits of charity. She might sometimes be seen, too, in the hospital and in the peasant cottages; but was never met anywhere else, except at church, when she always slipped away so suddenly that no one had time to address her. She was also seen, occasionally, in the English place of worship, appearing and disappearing without exchanging a word with any one. To sick chambers, however, she introduced herself, with offers of help, without ceremony; and, of rich and poor indifferently, was frequently enabled to soothe the troubled mind, or assuage the pains of the dying body. When asked her name, this mysterious person only shook her head and smiled, so that at last people got tired of asking; and, as she did not

wear a hat, but a black silk hood, rather like the Maltese faldetta—"

"But what is that like, Madame?" asked Aimée.

"Like a black silk apron, with a whalebone in the waist part of it, thrown over the head, and held under the chin," said Madame Bereti.

"As she always wore this, and was always dressed in black, she got the name of Le petit Capuchon Noir. As, on leaving the market, she used to disappear with her purchases, diving into the recesses of a mountain behind the town, no one knew where to send for her when she was wanted. The churchwardens, however, of the two principal churches, Messrs. Montgolfier and Patterson, used to announce to her the names of those who had asked for her each day, and to

give her the addresses of the inquirants on a card, on which was printed the words 'Le petit Capuchon Noir;' and never was one of these appeals for help in vain.

"She was often watched that her place of abode might be discovered; but she was always aware when eyes of spies were upon her, and contrived to weary out her pursuers with her long rambles, often continued far into the night, till they were obliged to leave her to herself.

"One evening, as she entered the church in the Place de la Rade, a messenger put a card into her hand, on which was written, 'Château Cyprès—pour l'amour de Dieu.' Thereupon, our hooded friend left the church instantly, and betook herself, without delay, to the Château Cyprès. This ancient structure

was very near the Maison Bicoque; and both were melancholy-looking, rambling old houses, whose inhabitants seldom left them. The inmates of Château Cyprès were, indeed, never seen at all. The family consisted of a mother and two daughters, the younger of whom, a girl of eleven years old, was in a rapid consumption, and her mother and sister never left her. At this moment they were in great distress; the mother had fallen ill of a fever, and her anxiety to recover, in order to tend her little Aline who seemed fast sinking, renewed her own illness. A letter from her husband, entreating her to come to him, as their only son was very ill, completed her agony; so when Zoë, her elder daughter, proposed to send for the Petit Capuchon Noir, who seemed to find com-

fort for every one, she did not ask how she had heard of her, but said,

"'Ah! yes—if she is not a nun.'

"So Zoë, who had heard of her through a woman of the town, who had been hired to assist their own maid, sent for Le petit Capuchon Noir. The summons was promptly attended to. A card, coming in a very little time, was put into the hands of Zoë, and immediately afterwards Le petit Capuchon Noir entered, saying, as she always did, 'God be with you—you are in trouble,' and then asked what she could do for her. Zoë replied by stating the particulars of their distress, and added,

"'And poor mamma thinks of going to papa and Serge. She has no idea she is so ill.'

"'What doctor have you?'

"'None! Mamma has no faith in French doctors.'

"'You are Russians?' said the Petit Capuchon Noir, speaking in that language.

"'Yes; and we know no one here who will come and see mamma.'

"She was indeed very ill; was in a high fever, no longer knew her children, and turned away from the stranger's face.

"'Speak Russian to her,' said Zoë.

"She did so, and the sound seemed to soothe the weary spirit. The visitor then repeated a few texts of Scripture—those, Vera, which you know so well, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,' &c.

"'Rest, rest!' murmured the invalid. 'Alexis, and Serge, and I at rest—at

rest! Poor Zoë!' and her voice took so mournful a tone of compassion that Zoë could not bear it, but said, leaving the room,

"'I will go to Aline.'

"Le petit Capuchon Noir, left alone with the invalid, took out her little book of prayers, and read it in Russian. As she did so, and came to the Kyrie Eleison, the hot bright look of the poor invalid was quenched in sudden tears; she then lay quietly listening, and when her self-constituted chaplain had finished, she began to bathe her head, after mixing a cooling drink for her. She received these attentions meekly, and with a glance which, though somewhat apathetic, bespoke returning consciousness.

"The room being darkened, and the patient seeming less feverish, Le petit

Capuchon Noir sat beside her, and began, after the manner of Eastern charmers, to tell a long story in a low voice, making at the same time a few slow passes with her hands, and letting her voice gradually fall into a kind of gentle undulating song, and putting one hand into that of the patient, she again made a few passes, and saw her charge sink into a placid sleep.

"Zoë at this moment appeared at the door, and moved, with the lightest tread, to the bedside, looked at her mother, and turning to Le petit Capuchon Noir, whispered with tears,

"'You have saved her—she had not slept for a week! Will you now go to Aline through that door; will watch mamma.'

"Le petit Capuchon, whose silent

step was one of her good qualities, passed through the further door into a room she had not yet seen.

"On a couch near the fire lay a small fragile child, white and fair, and extremely tiny in every limb, with a face of great beauty, stamped, alas! with the hectic look of excitement and fatigue so peculiar to the malady that was carrying her to an early grave.

"'Are you come to cure mamma?' said she, holding out her little hand; 'oh, thank you for that!'

"'I am come to help your sister, and take care of your mother and you also,' said the Petit Capuchon Noir, gently.

"'And what is your name?'

"'You may call me Le petit Capuchon Noir—I give no other name.'

"'You might to me—I am so soon going away; and if you are as good as Justine says you are, I shall pray for you in heaven: but you know there are no false names there; it is our true name that is written in the Book of Life——Oh, I beg your pardon, do forgive me—I forgot I did not know you.' And with a look of sweet entreaty, she put up her face for a kiss.

"'Dear one,' said Le petit Capuchon Noir, kissing her fondly, 'we are no strangers when once we can speak of heaven together. You are right'—the little girl looked pleased—'you are right to say there are no false names in heaven; but, dearest, you forget that we shall not need to be told them there—we shall all know all.'

"'Ah! yes; I like that thought. It seems so easy to me to feel that I shall soon be there, and that I shall see Jesus Christ ready to receive me, and present me—who am really so often naughty—faultless for His sake. All this seems so near and so plain, that I wonder other people do not see it. Mamma always speaks as if I should soon be well; and when you said, "you are quite right," just now, I thought you meant that, and I was so glad to find some one who owned it was true!'

"'It would be a *rest*, would it not?' said Le petit Capuchon Noir, tenderly.

"'Yes—oh! yes,' said the little girl, wearily.

"'And we are to look for *rest* in heaven, my child—not here. To bear with our own and other people's un-

certainties is often our last lesson upon earth; but you have talked too much.'

"'No,' said the child, trying to smile, 'I shall soon be better!"

"But one of her fits of gasping had come on, and was followed by a violent attack of her cough, after which she lay faint and quite exhausted in Le Capuchon's arms. Zoë had heard her, and sent Justine for some warm jelly, which revived the looks of the little sufferer, and stilled the trembling of her thin white hands.

"Le petit Capuchon Noir took this opportunity of going into the gallery that ran behind Aline's room, to recover her composure; for she was deeply moved by the condition of this house of misery.

"Three days were passed thus at the Château Cyprès, during which time the strange nurse was only absent for one hour every morning and every evening. Aline's disorder continued to make its fearful progress. Her mother's fever had left her; but she was very weak, and her spirits most deplorably low and wretched. Zoë, with wonderful courage and strength, aided by her new friend, cheered both her patients. It was a great comfort to her that Le petit Capuchon Noir could read the Scriptures and prayers in their own tongue; for though, like all educated Russians, they understood French, there is nothing like the sound of one's own language for religious exercises in a sick room. To Aline this was a great consolation; for, since her mother's illness, Zoë had been too busy to read

to her, and Justine's reading, though the best in the household, was very imperfect indeed.

"Towards the end of the third day, the evening silently closing over the unhappy party, as Zoë was sitting by her mother, and the doctor, having given very desponding opinions of his patient, had just taken his leave, the mother suddenly exclaimed,

"'Zoë, where is Le petit Capuchon Noir?'

"'Gone out, mother, as she does every evening.'

"'Who is she? — where does she come from? — of what nation is she?"

"To all these questions Zoë could but reply,

"'I do not know,' or, 'I have not asked her.'

"'Zoë,' said her mother, 'give me my writing-desk, and go to Aline.'

"'Justine is with her, and you are not strong enough to write yet.'

"'I tell you to go to Aline, and to give me my writing-desk.'

"'Have you wanted me?' asked at this moment a gentle voice.

"'Oh, thank heaven you are returned! And now sit by me, for I have much to say to you. I had hoped to have been ere now on my way to my husband and child, but I was in great distress how to leave my daughters. Providence afflicted me with illness, I chafed at the delay this occasioned, but it has enabled me to know you, and I feel sure I am not acting foolishly by entrusting them to your care. I leave with you Zoë's passport in case anything should happen

to me on the way; but I hope to return and claim them in a few weeks hence. Is it asking too much of you to come and reside here altogether, and devote yourself to them? There is a large chest of valuables in this room —here is a list of its contents,' said she, opening her desk, 'my will and directions concerning them, a letter to Zoë, and one to yourself. Do not forsake my poor girls, my little Aline is so delicate. It is for her sake I dare ask so great a service of a perfect stranger.'

"'You place a confidence in me that will not be misplaced,' said the visitor. 'But how can you trust me thus far?—you do not even know my name, and I cannot tell you. But if my word, my solemn promise, will comfort you, be very sure that I will not forsake your children

till you or their father return to claim them. I will treat them as if they were my own."

"'Now, may God in heaven hear your vow, and bless you for the consolation you have given me!' said the poor invalid, drawing her close to her, and solemnly impressing a kiss on her forehead.

"'I will tell you,' she added, 'but not my children, when I think of going. I shall be able to do it now.'

"She turned then on one side, and lay silent for some time. Zoë came in, and she bid her good-night, and told her to kiss Aline for her. When Zoë was gone, she said,

"'I have a longing to kiss Aline myself to-night. Give me your arm, will you?'

"And with this aid she reached the little girl's room. She was much shocked

at the change in her since she had seen her last.

"'Mamma,' cried Aline, 'oh, thank God—thank God!'—but looking at her mother, her countenance changed. 'Oh, what is this?' she said, clinging to her convulsively.

"'Aline!' said her mother, 'my child! my child! In heaven you will never suffer any more! Are you ready, my beloved? Is your hope firm and steadfast? We have no priest here but the Great High-Priest—but He is all in all.'

"'Yes, mother, and He has sent us a ministering angel. Ask her to pray for us, mother dear.'

"Le petit Capuchon Noir, at this request, knelt and repeated, in their own tongue, 'Our Father,' and the 'Kyrie Eleison.' Both voices followed her at

first; but the child's ceased at 'Thy kingdom come,' and the mother's at 'Thy will be done.' 'Daily bread,' 'temptation,' 'evil'—with these they had now nought to do.

"'Mother,' said Aline, 'I see the heavens opened, and the glory of God!'

"And having said this, she fell asleep. Her mother was supported back to bed, and laid down. With a fearfully-beautiful smile, she put her hand upon her friend's arm, and said,

"'Hush! she sleeps! I may go home now! Remember my poor Zoë! God bless her!'

"Zoë was in the room. Vaguely disquieted, she had risen and come down to see that all was quiet. She just heard her mother's last words, and caught her last sigh!

"Sudden and severe was the blow; she had thought her mother better that morning, and was not at all prepared for this trial.

"Seeing her, as it were, stunned by the calamity, Le petit Capuchon Noir watched over her and prayed beside her; then, thinking that perhaps the softer grief, for which she was prepared in some degree, might be of use, she spoke of Aline.

"'Aline!' exclaimed Zoë—'oh! it will kill her! I cannot tell her of this grief!'

"'She can no longer hear of sorrow!—she is at rest! Come and see how peaceful she looks!'

"Nothing had yet been done. Aline lay as if indeed asleep. She had not been dead long enough for her beautiful

eyes to open; and her delicate little face, if paler, wore a less wearied expression than usual. As her sister stooped and kissed her, the tears flowed in torrents from her eyes, and, once set free, it seemed as if they would never cease.

"Her friend, in these distressing circumstances, took the whole management of the house upon herself, and watched over her night and day most tenderly.

"Zoë, though very young, had not suffered so much anxiety without losing something of the elasticity of youth. When her friend was obliged to leave her, she sat in the sad room where the two loved ones lay in their coffins, as if she could not endure to be alone; and when the Capuchon Noir returned, she clung to her as if she could not bear to let her go out of her sight.

"But the poor little Capuchon Noir was getting very much worn with this charge, and was much relieved when a telegram from St. Petersburgh announced that one from her had been received, and that Zoë's father would soon join his sorrowful daughter.

"It was now very difficult for the mysterious benefactress of the neighbourhood to avoid being discovered; in retreating to her own abode, as she could not wait till dark, as she formerly had done when watched. Some accounts of the tragic events at Château Cyprès had been spread by Justine, among her companions, and Le petit Capuchon Noir, being somewhat mysteriously mixed up with the history of this secluded family, her movements were curiously followed by prying eyes. But watch as they

might, no one ever saw her farther than the outskirts of the long, rambling fortifications that, as every one knows, crown the hills of Hyères, and are now much more strictly guarded than in the time of the former proprietor; though he had established a guard-house to keep out intruders, and thus made it difficult for any one to imagine for what reason Le petit Capuchon Noir had taken up her abode in so secluded a spot.

"One day, however, some weeks after the death of Princesse Ivanenko and little Aline, and whilst Zoë was expecting her father and Serge (of whom there were good accounts), two gentlemen were walking on the hill I have mentioned, when they saw the little figure of Le Capuchon Noir come quickly and lightly up its rocky path, with a basket in her hand.

"'Ah! ah!' said they, 'now we are sure of her; let us get behind this projecting rock and watch her—she will pass directly.'

"They stood, consequently, aside, and hid themselves; the light step came rapidly nearer and nearer. To their surprise, however, it died away suddenly. They resolved, nevertheless, to wait; for report said that she not only went up but came down the mountain twice daily. Climbing higher, these inquisitive persons sauntered about till the weather grew raw and cold, and so dark that they could scarcely see any object in their immediate neighbourhood. They were at present close to the straggling walls, with square towers of some ancient structure, here and there intervening, and were idly pulling down the ivy to frighten the

screech owls, when one of them touched the other on the arm. 'Look there!' whispered he—and there was the little Capuchon Noir standing in relief against the grey sky, upon one of the towers just spoken of; but in a moment she was on the grass below, and hastening away. Her pursuers followed her, and gained upon her. She then turned up the hill again, in order to double upon them—but they *would* not be baffled; whilst she, feeling that Zoë was alone and wretched, rashly tried a short-cut down the mountain's side. This was a dangerous experiment. The rugged ground and increasing darkness made her, in her haste, trip and fall. Trying to rise, she found herself unable to do so, and was, therefore, overtaken by the two gentlemen in pursuit of her, who, with no lack of

tenderness and skill, conveyed her to the nearest house, and asked admittance at the garden-gate. Fortunately, the owner was enjoying the still evening hour, and hastened to give admission to the party. He soon saw what the matter was, and, calling his sister Margaret, begged her to receive the poor lady, and take all possible care of her for the night.

"'Ah, no,' said the Capuchon Noir, in very good English.

"'Where is your home?'

"'I was going to the Château Cyprès,' was the reply.

"'Pardon me,' said the owner of the house, 'but you are in no fit state to go there. Who are these gentlemen? Do they go to the Château?—might they not give information of your accident?'

"One of them upon this lifted his hat, and said,

"'I shall have the honour of doing so, if I may call to-morrow and inquire how Madame finds herself.' And then presenting his card to her and to Mr. Osborne, the proprietor of the house, he took his leave, followed by his companion.

"Le petit Capuchon Noir was put to bed in a comfortable room, and a surgeon sent for, who quickly set her broken limb. She bore her pain well, but some inexplicable distress seemed to weigh upon her mind. Margaret, who sat by her, saw the contraction of her forehead and fingers, and said to her brother,

"'I am sure, Edmund, she is very unhappy, and has something on her

mind; she seems struggling hard for patience. It is not only the accident which distresses her — she has some weighty care. Who can she be?—they call her the Capuchon Noir, but I do not feel at all sure she is a right sort of person to live in the house.'

"'Margaret, her leg is broken, and she cannot move.'

"'Well, don't fly off! I only hope that if she can go to-morrow I shall be very glad. Who are her friends?'

"'Friends!—she says she don't know them, but she keeps the card before her eyes.'

"'Whose is it?' asked her brother. 'Oh, here it is—Duc de L——.'

"'Duc de L——!' exclaimed Margaret, in a tone of respect. 'How very curious!'

"'And the other?' asked Edmund, seeing she held both.

"'Comte de V—— ! — how very strange! I wonder how it all happened. But, Edmund,' continued she, her good-nature now quite restored, 'I have seen her at church, so I think you might try to comfort her— she seems to be so very unhappy.'

"Edmund, than whom no man more skilled to minister sympathy and comfort to the wounded spirit ever trod God's earth, sent on this hint to propose a visit as clergyman to his involuntary guest. Thanking him, the Capuchon Noir accepted his offer.

"'I wished to see you,' said she, 'for I was too weak at first to thank you for receiving so kindly a perfect stranger, brought to you under such

singular circumstances. I must explain now how an alarm, needless perhaps, at finding myself pursued, made me leave the regular pathway, which occasioned my fall. I am at present paying dearly for my cowardice.'

"'Are you in much pain?' said Edmund.

"'No — at least, it does not much matter; but I am terribly grieved at being thus laid up in your house. Will you procure for me a litter from the hospital to take me to the Château Cyprès, and will you so contrive it that I can see the Duc de L—— alone when he calls.'

"'Yes, certainly—is that all I can do for you?'

"'All, I thank you—there is nothing else.'

"Edmund had nevertheless noticed the change which passed over her countenance when she spoke of the mountain, and thought of the reports which were current about her early visits to that place.

"'Can I take no message for you to anyone at daybreak?'

"'You!—would you really go yourself?'

"'Of course I would—tell me what I am to do.'

"'Will no one watch you?—will you tell no one?'

"'I solemnly promise no one shall find out anything.'

"'Then I shall indeed thank you, and be grateful for life.'

"So saying, she stretched out her hand, which he took in his—it was

very pretty and white, and he did not regret his unconditional promise.

"'You know the cross just outside the ruins?' continued she; 'take then a letter I will give you, and this white handkerchief, and hang them over the arm of the cross—it is not very high; and do not speak or endeavour to see what happens.'

"She then wrote a note and gave it to Mr. Osborne, who, taking it, reiterated his promise to keep the matter secret, offering at the same time to pray with her.

"'Thank you,' said she, 'I shall thank you much. I can listen now.'

"Few perhaps could have said so with a compound fracture of the leg, but this mysterious lady was inured to suffering.

"Mr. Osborne had not recollected the curiosity of his inquisitive sister Margaret, or he might have given his promise of secrecy with some caution.

"That worthy lady, who was on the tip-toe of expectation, awaited his coming out of the sick-room with impatience; and when he came was quite put out to find that she could, as she expressed it, 'get nothing out of him.' She felt sure, therefore, that he had 'got something out of' his patient, and vainly did she teaze him, till he cut the matter short by wishing her good night.

"She, to do her justice, had no idea of sitting up to watch him; but she had no idea of not sitting up to watch her invalid, and accordingly she took off her dress, combed up her

hair, and, wrapping herself in a large flowered chintz dressing-gown, spent the night by the bedside of the poor little Capuchon Noir.

"Early next day a young voice is heard at the door, a young foot on the stairs, and Zoë darted up to her friend, who lay upon the sofa.

"She was much agitated, and the two ladies sat some time together without uttering a word.

"Then said Zoë, 'You must come home; the litter is at the door, and we will have you carried very carefully. Papa is longing to see you.'

"'Is M. le Prince arrived?"

"'Yes, he came at midnight. I was crying, and very miserable, when all at once I heard a carriage drive up. I had not undressed, so in a moment I

was down-stairs. Ah, I cannot tell you about that meeting!'

"'And Prince Serge?'

"'He was not strong enough to accompany papa — the sad news was too much for him. Papa left him with my Aunt Ida. You must come—papa longs to see you.'

"'I must wait to speak to some one who is expected here, and then I will gladly come, dear Zoë. I am so thankful you have your papa just as I am laid up.'

"'You dear thing!—I do believe you don't care now.'

"A strange expression passed over the face she was looking at.

"'Oh! yes—I forgot you can't go out morning and evening now, to that somewhere or somebody—I never knew what, really. Can I go for you?'

"Le petit Capuchon Noir bent over the fair face of Zoë, who was kneeling beside her, and replied by a long and loving kiss.

"Margaret and Edmund had been in to see the patient — Edmund to whisper, 'It is done!' and Margaret to follow him up so close that he could only further, by a look, assure the Capuchon Noir that her commission was executed. He had gone out, in fact, with the first gleam of daylight, had climbed the rocky path, and had found the cross on which he suspended the note and handkerchief, close under one of the towers of which we have already spoken. Having accomplished, so far, his mission, he abstained from looking round him, as he retreated down the rocky steep, and round and round the moun-

tain's brow, till he arrived at a point where a ravine, deep and gloomy, but possessing great pictorial beauty, arrested his steps in admiration of the scene of which it was a very prominent feature. Something else, though—much more grotesque, if not quite so picturesque—became visible at this moment, viz., the broad fair face of his sister Margaret, her ample figure shrouded in the wonderful dressing-gown, and her light hair combed back *à la chinoise*. The uncontrollable curiosity, however, of the lady received no satisfaction; and she was, therefore, in duty bound, as she thought, to follow her brother about till she got his secret from him.

The room assigned to the invalid was particularly well situated to catch the first mild warm glow of the dawning

day, and Miss Margaret, rising from her vigils and going to the window, thought that 'a breath of morning air' would refresh her more than anything else. She therefore called her maid to take her place, and sallied forth. She had not been many minutes abroad when she heard her brother coming down the hill. This might have excited her curiosity, and her appearance might have excited his, but that both had hearts so feelingly attuned to the loveliness of God's works that he broke out with that splendid chant,

'Glory be to Thee, O God!'

"After watching the sky till the sun was fairly up, they turned to descend the hill; and stopping at the garden gate each spontaneously exclaimed,

"'By-the-bye, Edmund, where do you come from?'

"'By-the-bye, Margaret, what have you got on?'

"And they laughed so much that the little housemaid turned in her bed and dreamt she was dreaming it was morning, and that it was all a mistake.

"They had not long been all up and occupied in the business of the day, before Zoë and the litter came. The doctor followed, and the Duc de L——, who courteously waited till the doctor was gone and the poor invalid carried down into the drawing-room, dressed for removal.

"When the Duc was admitted the little Capuchon Noir was reclining on a sofa.

"'I must,' said he, 'before you speak,

Madame, apologize for the Comte de V—— and myself, and assure you of our very deep sorrow at the accident that has befallen you. I trust you will point out some way in which I can serve you, that I may thereby prove how sincerely grieved I am for what has happened. Speak, I beseech you, for I see there is something to be explained.'

"'There is,' said the little Capuchon Noir, and determining to play a bold game. 'There is a poor man in this place, for whom I am interested. He is ill and in distress, and ordered to go to Malta, where he would find friends. I was going to ask the doctor to obtain for him admission into the hospital, but since you purpose so generously to grant any request of mine I venture to beg

you to send him to Malta directly on my account. I will defray the expenses by instalments, for I know he is a worthy object, and that the story he has told me is true.'

"'I am only sorry that your request is so slight a one,' responded the Duc. 'I will give him an order on Capitaine Louis, who sails from Toulon to-morrow, in the "Sylphide" steamer, if that will do. What is his name? Can he go to-day?'

"'Philippe Honorat. He can go to-day. I can send the litter to take him to the diligence when I have done with it.'

"'Cannot he walk?'

"'No, for he is very ill.'

"'I will attend to your wishes—and now I want to be off, for we have a

pic-nic, and then hunt to-day and to-morrow, but I could not go without making my *amende.*'

"And the light-hearted French nobleman mounted his horse and rode off.

"Le petit Capuchon Noir was carried to the Château Cyprès, where she told her bearers that they would find upon the hill-side, just at the old Church, an old man, who would answer to the name of Philippe Honorat, who, on receiving an order to that effect, was to be conveyed to the diligence starting for Toulon. She added that the *conducteur* should look to her for payment, and gave a paper making herself responsible, signed, 'Le Petit Capuchon Noir.'

"So well was she known, or so much respected, that this signature was quite

sufficient, and the best place in the diligence was assigned to her protégé, as he was supposed to be. Thankful indeed was she to hear that he was fairly gone, though in private she shed many tears.

"Little did the young and gallant Duc de L—— think that he was thus succouring a man who had been falsely accused of forging his father's name—who had escaped from a long imprisonment —who dreaded nothing so much as to meet the Duc de L——, had been hiding in order to avoid such an encounter in a ruined tower, where he was daily supplied with food by his daughter, ever since the arrival of the Duc in the neighbourhood.

"The very day the litter bearers went to find him at the old church, he had, as usual, looked out of the very small

aperture half-way up the tower, and had seen the white handkerchief on the cross. Drawing it in with his stick, he found in it some money, and the following note:—

"'Having met with an accident after I left you yesterday, I shall not be able to come up the hill for the present, and I fear your provisions will not last long. I must, therefore, contrive to have you brought away to a place of safety—trust to me. Answer to the name of Philippe Honorat, and wait till you hear from me at the gap in the ruined wall of the church. I shall send a litter there, and will provide for your safety. God speed you!

"'Your ever dutiful, loving daughter,

"'VLADIMIREVNA.'

"At about this time some young men,

who were crossing the hill to a neighbouring village, astonished their friends by stating that they had seen smoke rising out of the old ruin by Hyères; that they had endeavoured to get over the wall to learn the cause of it; but, as the wall was high at this part, had found great difficulty, even with the aid of the cross, in doing so. In scrambling about, they were quite sure, they said, that they had heard groans; and, being rather frightened, had thought of going to the church and telling the priest. The priest, however, was not to be found; and, on leaving the church, they saw nobody but a feeble old man, who was sitting on the ruined church wall. He had, they observed, a little bundle in his hand; and, when asked if he was waiting for any one, he said, 'Ay, is the priest

there yet?' They then inquired of him whether any one lived in the ruins. He replied that he knew not, though it would not be strange if they had an inhabitant or two. The young men, then leaving him, rambled on till they came to a tower which, like all the rest, had a door inserted in it, from which several bricks had been removed, and only loosely restored to their places. Through this door, or opening, the youthful adventurers made a descent, and crawled down into a very tiny room—so small, that the ingenuity that had formed there anything like a habitable shelter was really to be admired. A little rope-ladder hung on the wall, a diminutive stove and cooking apparatus, a few books, and a very narrow bedstead, were all that this minute abode could contain. Afterwards

the concierge of the Château made money by showing it, and another room, less furnished, near it, which had been the Capuchon Noir's own little nest when not in town.

"Whilst the discoverers of this retreat were proceeding to their village, its late inhabitant was being whirled away to Toulon, where he was welcomed by Capitaine Louis, and found a good berth on board the 'Sylphide.'

"Thankful, indeed, was the dutiful daughter to hear that her father was gone; still more so to learn, by a telegram, that he was safe and well.

"It was not without a pang, certainly, that one so dear to her was so abruptly dismissed; but his safety was her first object, and that was now secured. She began, at the same time, to recover from

the effects of her accident; and her first painful meeting with Prince Ivanenko was over. That nobleman was much moved, and the first interview with the new friend of his family was very brief. He soon learnt, however, to pay her frequent and long visits, in which he became informed of every detail of his wife's and Aline's last days on earth.

"After the lapse of a few weeks, the Capuchon Noir wished to quit the Château; but the Prince would not hear of this. He should like, he said, to induce her to accompany him and Zoë; or, if she could not do that, even to follow with Zoë would greatly relieve his anxieties. In reply to this invitation, she said it was impossible, as she had ties which could not be broken. 'I have,' she continued, 'a father and a child in

Malta, and I must go to them. My husband was an Italian.

"'And you—of what nation are you?'

"'I was born in Russia, and educated in England and in Italy, in which last country I married; I have lived most in Malta, where I became a widow. My mother was English, my father French.'

"'Would you dislike to return to Russia?'

"'Oh, no; I should like my child to learn Russian, and should have gone there long ago, but that the journey is so long and expensive.'

"'And your father? Would he come also?'

"'It would exactly suit him. At least, I think so.'

"'Ask him, and, if he approves, go, when you are well enough, to Malta, take

him and your little girl to Constantinople, then cross the Black Sea and I will join you there with Serge for the summer, when we can determine on our plans for the future. I should not wish to take Zoë to the north just at present.'

"It was thus settled; and when, some years afterwards, Ida Vladimirevna met the Duc de L—— in Paris, she was accompanied by the Prince Ivanenko, a beautiful dark Italian-looking girl, and two fine little Russian children. She left her name at the door of Madame le Duchesse de L——, as Princesse Ida Ivanenko, *née* 'Le petit Capuchon Noir.'

"She met the duke at dinner, and told him all her story, and how he had assisted the escape of her poor father, then no more. He asked after the beautiful girl he had seen walking by the

litter, in her deep mourning garments, and white-edged weepers, and learnt that she was married, and gone to Irkutsh with her husband, the governor of that place. 'And,' said she, 'may it please Heaven to bless the good actions of M. le Duc de L——, and may he make many destinies as happy as that of Le petit Capuchon Noir!'"

"Why did her father," asked Nadine, the story being over, "take a Russian name, if he was a Frenchman?"

"Because his father had married a Russian heiress."

"I thought she said her mother was English?"

"She was, but his mother was Russian. They belonged a little to all Europe," said Vera.

"Yes," said Madame Bereti, "the

name he gave, 'Philippe Honorat,' was his father's old name in France."

"And who was the little Capuchon Noir? Did she really live?"

"Yes, she did; and lives still. Perhaps you may have seen her—"

"Ivanenko!" exclaimed, Vera; "to be sure I know Princess Ivanenko—that is to say, I used to know her. She used to come very often to see Hélène; but I have not heard anything of her for a long time, and I never knew her history. Did she tell it to you herself?"

"No, your sister told it to me; and I thought it so curious and interesting that I wrote it down; for it is one of the kind one often meets with in books, but which, though real, are seldom related in real life.

All the children declared the story to be a capital one.

"It was," said the narrator, "but I have shortened it a good deal, and suppressed many details that I thought would not interest you. Well, how is the dull long evening, Nadine—do you know it is eleven o'clock? Make haste and pack up your work. Aimée has not heard it all."

"No," said Aimée, rubbing her eyes. "Did Aline really die? Do tell me."

"We will tell you to-morrow," cried Nadine, "come to bed now;" and they all, after prayers, dispersed.

The first steady winter weather was now setting in; the ponds were already hard, and the thermometer marked twelve degrees of cold. Yet the temperature

was not disagreeable; all was so well prepared for the severe season, and every one knew so well how to meet it, that the saying. proved perfectly true, that with fires, furs, and food, you may set in Russia colds and coughs at defiance.

## CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTMAS was now drawing nigh. The earth had been for many weeks shrouded in white, and a frost of 20 deg. rendered land and water an equally good highway.

On St. Anna's day, the shortest in the year, Madame Bereti gave the children a grand holiday. After mass she bid them order a sledge, and took them over to visit their sister Anna, whose fête-day it was.

From this visit the party did not return for several days, and not till

after Madame Bereti's own birthday was passed, and she had entered on a new year.

This sort of visiting could not take place in England, but in Russia it is not considered extraordinary for friends and acquaintances to arrive unexpectedly and stay long at each other's houses, celebrating a family fête. The children and Madame Bereti were thoroughly aware that they were quite at liberty to take advantage of this custom.

The day before Christmas, that is, the eve of the Epiphany, new style, is observed by the Russians as a very severe fast. A tray containing tea without any condiments, and some slices of bread, was therefore brought into the school-room at 8 o'clock, A. M. The bread the children would have

refused, but Madame Bereti advised them to take some, saying that that sustenance, scanty as it was, would enable them to perform their duties all the better; yet long before six o'clock, the dinner hour, arrived, Nadine and Aimée especially began to quarrel and yawn, and to wonder what was the matter with them. Seeing this, Madame Bereti cut short the lessons, and sent them to bathe and prepare for the coming festival; after which she accompanied them to the great house.

The family gathering was very small this year, consisting but of a very few individuals besides the usual ten or twelve that assembled daily round the board.

Of course the dinner was all *maigre:* three or four sorts of soups, followed

by fish cutlets, and fish dressed with surprising ingenuity in every variety of way; and when one considers that all aid from eggs, milk, cheese, butter, lard—in short, from every animal substance — was excluded, one could not applaud too much the culinary science displayed. What would our *chefs*, so renowned for their Greenwich dinners, say to such a restriction?

The family circle were still at table when the General rose and proposed the health of his little grandson, Olègue. It was drunk with acclamations.

"Olègue," said Nadine, in explanation to Madame Bereti, "was born on Christmas-day, so that, as it is past midnight, it is his birthday, and he must this year begin to be educated by men. But listen, papa is speaking."

The General then informed the company that he had more news to tell them about Olègue.

"St. Petersburgh," he said, "did not agree with the boy, and he was to have a tutor; therefore he was to come and reside with his grandfather, under the care of M. de Rosen, who had brought up his uncle, their youngest brother."

This was very good news for the affectionate aunts, and Madame Bereti heard many stories of the little hero during the course of the next few days, and had to tell some herself, for she had seen him very lately at St. Petersburgh, and fully entered into the joy of her pupils.

Christmas-day passed very quietly, without any of the observances, except divine service, which characterizes it in

England and Germany. Only one ceremony, perhaps, puts one in mind of the Western solemn jubilation of the seasons, viz., the procession of the peasants with a lighted star and transparencies, representing the Nativity, and chanting at the same time the sacred story in verse. This was followed by a sort of puppet-show, in the style of the ancient mysteries, curiously illustrative of national feeling and prejudices, which, as it is peculiar to this part of Russia, I will briefly describe.

The little theatre on which this mystery was enacted was brought in and placed on two chairs. The figures were little marionettes, played by a peasant well skilled in the art; and very curiously were national feelings drawn out in this miniature exhibition.

The first scene represented the journey into Egypt. An angel with a lighted taper showed the way, whilst Joseph led the ass. The angel then leaves the travellers, and Joseph sinks into a deep sleep, the Virgin and Child patiently awaiting his awakening, and the return of the heavenly guide. During his absence the shepherds enter and adore the Holy Infant; then follow the magi and present their gifts. The angel by this time re-appears, accompanied by a choir of spirits, who escort the Holy Family.

The second scene is both retrospective and prospective in point of time, and represents Herod in his palace. His fury on hearing of the birth of the King of the Jews, and his rage on finding himself mocked by the wise

men, are very vividly described; and results in his giving orders for the massacre of all new-born children. Rachel comes in person to weep before Herod with a baby in her arms, which one of the king's guards picks off her bosom on the end of a lance, and drives her out of the royal presence. A Pole then enters, and spitting in Herod's face, announces to him the approach of death. Herod upon this again calls his guards, but instead of capturing the Pole they find themselves engaged in a fierce contest with Death. On this allegorical personage no weapon takes effect, whilst his inexorable scythe mows down all before it. As to his particular dealing with the Jewish monarch, he begins by abusing him in no measured terms; he then orders

him to present his head—shears it off, gives the monarch a punch in the chest, and calls for two great hissing serpents, who quickly devour his flesh; the devil, coming in for the skeleton and head, concludes this very edifying piece of sacred history.

A purely national farce, written by a Cossack at the time of the Polish occupation of this part of Russia, followed this theologic entertainment. This piece contained some bold touches of humour, in the different domestic characteristics it ascribes to different nations. They are all introduced to the spectators enacting parts or dancing round the stage. The German and his frau waltz separately; the Russian student and his lady-love dance together; the Bohemian beats his wife because the purse round

her neck is empty, at which hint the spectators go forward and drop a few kopecks into it ; the Cossack belabours his helpmate gratuitously ; she, in return, kisses him most meekly.

These scenes having been repeated three or four times, this Cossack, being the leading character, beats all the rest by twos and threes, and, as they continue to return, he dismisses them with still severer blows, being especially hard upon a Roman Catholic priest (at that time detested in Russia) and upon a Jew, who represent the mercantile and mercenary spirit of the age. The Jew introduced into this satirical piece cringes, crawls, and kneels, still holding fast to a treasure of which he thinks he is about to be deprived. The Roman Catholic priest, entangled in his long robes, falls very

soon. The devil himself at last enters and attacks the Cossack, who compels him to dance with him, and meets all his accusations with warnings not to vex him. "Don't anger me! don't anger me!"—an exclamation which elicits bursts of applause. When this deprecated event takes place, and the Cossack *is* angered, there is a tremendous struggle, and victory remains for some minutes doubtful; but the Cossack conquers, and is declared invincible, till the wily Jew, returning with a little flask of liquor, overcomes the conqueror and drubs him whilst he is tipsy. Sobered by this assault, the Cossack revives, and, by a stroke or two of his iron club, drives off the Jew discomfited, and remains undoubted victor of the field. The frank allusion to Cossack victories completes the exactness of

this picture of Ukrainian life at a time when, priest-ridden, and oppressed by the Poles, despoiled and cheated by the Jews, and overcome by the Tartars, the people looked with envy on the money-getting Bohemian and domestic German—the only neighbours about whom they knew anything. This entertainment over, the peasants received thanks and some vodka.

On the last day of the year, it is the habit in Russia to throw melted lead on the snow, to see whose initial or what form it will take. Wise women tell fortunes and utter predictions thereupon, but children observe the practice merely for amusement. Vera and Nadine begged Madame Bereti to tell them something about Christmas in other countries; and she gave them a description of the old English Christmas once prevalent and still

cherished in some parts of England—of the crêche seen in France, Switzerland, and Catholic Germany—of the Bambino of Rome, and of the Christmas tree of all Germany.

This latter, they said, they had seen sometimes, and looked at each other significantly—when, at this moment, the door flew open and displayed a splendid tree, with bunches of fruit, bonbons, crackers, pretty things and costly presents for every one.

The General—as happy as a child himself—distributed his valuable and beautiful gifts. Some of the best were for Madame Bereti.

Vera, and Nadine, and Aimée were especially delighted with a large contribution to the store from sister Eélèna Nicolaievna Tolstoi.

This distribution over, and every one retired to rest, one would have supposed the excitements of the day concluded; but it was not so. At about three o'clock a bare-legged girl rushed into Vera's room, exclaiming, "Klutchie pajalsta, klutchie Vera Nicolaievna!" and proceeded to tell her half-awakened mistress that a carriage full of visitors had just arrived in the court, and that the keys of all the rooms were wanted. Madame Bereti overheard the conversation, and hastily arose, as did Vera, to receive the new arrivals. They were rather numerous. The little hero of the day, accompanied by his tutor and his uncle, was in one carriage, and in the other the whole family of the gentleman who had rescued Nadine.

This influx of new company brought

with it a great increase of amusement and gaiety, and broke up altogether the routine life that had preceded it. Little Olègue was always with his young aunt; and sledging parties in the morning, and dances in the evening, occupied every day until New Year's eve, which here, as everywhere in Russia, is celebrated by a grand feast at midnight. Just as the clock struck twelve, the tall champagne glasses were filled to the brim with white champagne for the ladies and rose-coloured for the gentleman, little Olègue kissed his grandfather, and saying, "Bonne année, grandpapa," touched glasses with him, the same salutation becoming immediately general

The next day the peasants, as a matter of course, crowded round the doors and threw corn and beans into their masters'

faces, wishing them a prosperous and fruitful year. The sledging and dancing then re-commenced, and were continued till the 5th, when a solemn fast, like that on Christmas eve, always takes place.

Early on the morning of the 6th, all were assembled, before breakfast, on the thick ice of the little river Nava, that runs through the estate, to witness the ceremony of the immersion of the cross, called the baptism of our Lord, which is celebrated on the 12th day after Christmas. The spectacle was a very picturesque one. The rocky banks of the river, covered with snow, sparkled in the sunshine—the blue sky above, so intensely serene, canopying so motley a crowd below; the peasants in their very whitest and newest "touloupes," set off by the reddest of handkerchiefs on the heads

of the married women, and the brightest ribbons round the waists and hanging in numerous ends down the backs of the young girls, with the priest in his gorgeous attire, and the brilliantly-dressed group from the house, made a most animated and striking scene.

Madame Bereti and her pupils were placed near the priest, and had, in consequence, a good view of the immense cross cut in the ice; and Nadine was busily pointing out to Olègue all her favourites in the crowd, when, on the solemn sound of the chants rising in the air, she became immediately silent. The voice of the priest took up at the right moment the sacred strain. This holy functionary held the large silver cross aloft before the eyes of the multitude, then dipped it solemnly three

times, into the water, and raised it glittering with a thousand drops sparkling on its jewels.

This act was greeted with acclamations by the people, and by the report of small cannon. The crowds then pressed forward with jugs and pitchers of every description to collect some of the water —esteemed sacred—which fell from the cross. Of this they drank a little, and kept the rest on the shelf with their images during the whole year. To be allowed to drink of this holy water, one must have abstained from food for several hours. On the return of our party to the house, the breakfast-table was eagerly surrounded ; and during the whole day the family, to the children's great delight, lived all together.

After this festival, things returned to

their usual course. Little Olègue and his tutor occupied the next house to the girls.

This arrangement did not, however, long continue. The General called Madame Bereti aside one evening, and told her he thought Vera was now old enough to be treated as the mistress of the house, in the absence of her sisters; that he should require her, therefore, to be always present whenever he had visitors, and that, on her approaching birth-day, he should give her rooms in the great house.

Madame Bereti asked if he did not think her rather young for this charge.

"No," he replied, "for I do not intend her to be there alone. You and her sisters will move into the house at the same time; but I shall not wish them to be much in the drawing-room."

Madame Bereti knew there was no use saying anything more; but she was sorry to think of the temptations to idleness and frivolity to which her beloved little Vera would now be exposed. And when Vera, after an interview with her father, came to talk over the proposed arrangement with Madame Bereti, the latter was pleased to observe that Vera spoke of leaving the school-room with regret.

This plan was carried into effect on the very day Vera completed her 17th year; and Madame Bereti was, before that day arrived, tolerably certain that it would be but temporary.

The Christmas guests were still lingering on, and others were quickly collecting. The wing inhabited by the little girls was being put in order for the reception of some of these visitors. They

all, in due time, arrived, and preparations were commenced, on a large scale, for a succession of gaieties.

"Do you think," said a lady neighbour, who arrived a little before the rest, "Do you think, Madame Bereti, that it is usual in our Russia to give so prominent a position to so young a girl as Vera—only just seventeen? No, no; but the General is a wise man, and knows what he is about—and so do you, or I am much mistaken."

"No, indeed," said Madame Bereti; "except that he is one of the kindest fathers that I ever met with, and wishes to please Vera, who will, I really hope, not be the worse for the indulgence."

"Indeed, he will be lucky if he does not spoil her altogether," returned

the lady. "However, it will not be for very long, I fancy."

Madame Bereti looked astonished, and not particularly pleased. She rose to go, saying she thought she was wanted.

"Believe me," said the lady, "your pupils are learning to do very well without you—one of them, at all events. However, she will not be very far off; in fact, I understand the estates join—"

"I don't know what you mean," said Madame Bereti, with *hauteur*.

"Don't you?—I will soon show you," said the lady. "Do me the favour to look into the next room."

"Excuse me," said Madame Bereti, "I am really wanted. I must take the children to supper."

So saying, she rose and looked for them in the ante-room. Not finding them

there, she passed again into the first drawing-room, and could not but feel her heart smite her; for the first object her eyes fell upon was the General smoking and talking confidentially to Viatcheslav, while he held Vera, his arm encircling her waist, closely to him.

Directly he saw Madame Bereti, he took off his smoking-cap and saluted her, with his usual politeness; by which movement he released Vera, who sprung to her, and asked where she was going.

"I am going to call Aimée and Nadine to supper. Will you come too?"

"Oh! yes, yes!" exclaimed Vera, eagerly.

And, calling the two little girls from a distant room, they all retired together.

Vera clung closely to her friend's arm, and, on reaching the apartments of her

sisters, expressed a wish not to return to the party. But this could not be, as she was not ill, and had no excuse for absenting herself. To the party, therefore, they all went.

After supper, the young ladies undressed, with the rapidity of Russian girls, and speedily re-appeared, decked in white transparent tarlton, relieved with rose-coloured ribbons; and found the guests of the house, and those come from a distance, looking a little shyly at each other.

"Oh! here is Mademoiselle Vera! Come, Ivan," said a fat, comely-looking dame to her ungainly son—"Come and congratulate her; and show her what you have got for her," added she.

Ivan awkwardly produced a bouquet and a little basket trimmed with moss.

"He thought you would like some flowers, Mademoiselle," said the good lady, in Russian.

"And a few eggs—they are rare at this season," said the youth, nervously.

"Holy saints! you have not brought them surely, Ivan?"

"Yes, mother, I did. I found them just the last thing myself, and I hid them."

Here he became suddenly shy, and stopped, but pointed awkwardly to the flowers.

Vera had much difficulty to keep her countenance while the son thus confessed his innocent subterfuge; and the mother's face expressed indignation and disappointment at having so signally failed in her attempt at making her Ivan appear to advantage.

Nadine laughed heartily.

"Hush, Nadine!" said Vera; "will you call Aimée?"

And Nadine, choking with merriment, ran away.

Madame Bereti took the basket, and said,

"Shall I give them to Vacili for you, Vera?"

"Oh, pray, do; and say that I should like to see something nice made of them at supper."

Ivan looked delighted, and asked her to dance.

"The band is not yet ready," said she, smiling, "and I am engaged for the first four dances, but I can give you the fifth if you like."

She then moved on, and said to Ma-

dame Bereti, when the latter returned,

"I can't think he knows how to dance, so I will get it over as soon as I can."

"Who are your other partners?"

"Olègue," said Vera laughing, "and my two cousins, Nicolai Petrovitch and Serge Ivanitch." She did not name the fourth. "Was not that funny about the eggs?" cried she—"they are of a very good family though."

"The eggs or the givers?"

"Ivan and his mother — they really are — but they have lived so long in seclusion that they are quite unlike everyone else. She wishes him to marry me."

"Vera, impossible!"

"Quite possible—but I do not intend

it. Did you understand all they said?"

"Yes, but it was not difficult. There are more guests arriving, Vera — you must go."

Vera was very busy receiving—Nadine no less so chatting to her special favourites, and Aimée feeding some little girls with dried cherries, of which she was herself particularly fond — until dancing began.

Madame Bereti resolved to watch them all, as usual, but found her eyes wandering to Vera in particular—the warning she received recurring to her mind and obscuring her vision. As she saw nothing particular to arrest her attention, she was obliged to look away and talk about something else less interesting, in order to recover herself.

On one of these occasions the lady who had put her mind into such fidget observing her, came up, sat down by her, and said,

"Look at them now!—can you doubt any longer what is the meaning of all these parties and all these changes? See how he watches her when he is not dancing with her. How he waits for her ice-saucer and spoon, and seems to see no one else. You cannot be blind to that?"

"To what?" asked Madame Bereti, innocently.

"Oh, nonsense!" returned the other lady; "as if you could not see! I do hate such overstrained loyalty and fidelity, and all other fiddle-de-dee virtues."

"I beg your pardon, Madame," said

Madame Bereti, looking earnestly at her very gay head-dress, "I beg your pardon, but may I venture, upon so short an acquaintance, to relieve you of a very large——"

"What?" exclaimed the lady, horrified, and moving both hands up to the precious fabric.

"Spider, madame," said Madame Bereti, gently and lightly brushing off the creature.

At the same moment the lady screamed and gave a desperate twitch to the coiffure, which followed the spider to the floor, causing a general astonishment at so unlooked for a catastrophe.

"Where is the spider? It will bite me!"

Such were her exclamations, which

quickly making her the centre of an amused group, she became highly indignant, and, but for the arrival of Nicolai Petrovitch, it is impossible to say what might not have happened. That gentleman picked up and presented the head-dress gravely, while Vera took her away to re-adjust it comfortably, and Viatcheslav remained conversing with Madame Bereti.

When Vera returned to the drawing-room she resumed her place, and endeavoured to continue dancing, but she was very pale, and soon came and sat down by her governess.

"Dear madame," said she, "may I go away?—I really am not well. Come with me into the garden."

"At this season, Vera, darling, and at this hour?—No, no, come into the

theatre; we shall be quiet there, and you will recover and dance again."

So saying, they effected their escape.

When alone, and Vera had taken some restoratives, she seemed better, but unwilling to speak of her indisposition. Madame Bereti, guessing its cause, did not urge her, but entered a silent protest against busy-bodies.

As soon as Vera's colour returned she advised her to go back at all events, if not to dance—

"For," said she, "your absence will be noticed, dear child, and that will be disagreeable to you."

"Yes—no—wait a moment, dear madame. I have something to tell you. That woman—that lady says—that—that—oh, I cannot tell you!"

"Never mind telling me, darling, and do not mind what she says—only be sure you know your own mind."

"No, but I thought to please papa, and now—she makes it all seem different—and yet—I cannot leave off all at once, it would grieve—"

"Make no change, Vera, dear; you are always quite as your father and everyone would wish—do not change, it might be unjust: only if you do not LIKE going on, that is another matter, and it would be better to pause in time."

Vera coloured crimson.

"I do not know — let me stay by you."

"Yes, until your guests want you, darling. Courage, Varinka! — courage, my darling child."

She kissed the fair, delicate head, that

bent down like a flower on its stalk —and they returned to the ball-room.

Almost at the same moment the General came out of his study, which also opened into the dancing-saloon, followed by Viatcheslav and Pavlovich, who, coming up to Vera, asked her to dance. She trembled a little, but accepted; and the General said to Madame Bereti,

"Would you look after the children a little?—they are flirting desperately, and I cannot afford to lose all my daughters at once."

He looked very wicked as he said this, and Madame Bereti could not help, as she caught his glance, answering it with a smile.

She found the little girls in deep flirtations — Aimée with Olègue, and

Nadine with Alexis, a cousin of fifteen years of age. They were all four together at one end of the room, and she saw Olègue rush suddenly away, while Aimée came and seated herself beside her governess, with an air of offended dignity.

At the same moment two young men passed them, laughing heartily, and exclaiming,

"Did you ever hear such nonsense? —he will certainly do it. What a little fool it is!"

"What is it?" said Nicolai Petrovitch, coming up to them—"of whom are you speaking?"

"Of that little simpleton, Olègue Nicolaivitch. He declares that he is broken-hearted, and will throw himself into the pond."

"He is pretty safe at this season," observed the other, laughing.

But Nicolai did not laugh; he strode hastily out of the room, looking really alarmed; and Madame Bereti, who had heard what passed, turned towards Aimée, who uttered a sort of cry, but nevertheless still looked angry, and sat pouting on the sofa.

Nicolai returned, laughing, and leading by the hand the romantic Olègue, whom he had found consoling himself at the buffet in the ante-room. The dancing continued, but Aimée still sat, swelling with anger, on the sofa.

A short time after this, Nadine came rushing up to her governess, in a state of great distress.

"Oh! Alexis! Alexis! Alexis!—he is gone! No one can find him! They say

he said he would shoot himself! Oh! do send some one to look after him!"

Madame Bereti rose hastily to do so, not knowing, from Nadine's excited manner, what to expect, and hoping she might be mistaken; but, directly she rose, Nadine called out, imploringly,

"Oh! do not leave me; they have all gone out to look for him."

"Who?" said Madame Bereti, seeing the room full.

"Ivan, and the Count Olaf, and Nicolai; and they found him on the ice, quite senseless!—and it is all my fault!"

Here she burst again into fits of weeping, so violent, that Madame Bereti's first care was to have her carried away and put to bed, where she soon had the satisfaction of seeing her grow calm, and sleeping, under the influence of a nar-

cotic, when she left her to inquire further into the affair.

On her return to the ball-room she found every one talking of the event. It appeared that this foolish young fellow had been making himself agreeable to the pretty Nadine; that, vexed with her trifling manner, he had quarrelled with her; and that the quarrel had ended in the desperate act he had committed.

He had already been carried in from the spot where he had been found. The friends who had hastened out after him missed him in the darkness. He had been seen to turn towards his room; but when his pursuers had groped their way there, he was already gone, and some time had elapsed before they had any further trace of him. At length, however, the flash and report of a pistol in

the direction of the rocky bank of the little river guided them, and they made all the speed they could towards it. There they found Alexis, apparently lifeless.

By the time they reached home, he was nearly as cold as the ice-water into which he had fallen—having taken care to shoot himself just over a fishing-hole.

They lost, of course, no time in bringing the crazy boy back to the house. His shot, which was charitably supposed to have been directed to his heart, must have been intercepted by some accident; for the ball was lodged in the left arm, just below the elbow!

The wound was not, therefore, dangerous. Consciousness soon returned, and he was pronounced to be in no danger. This occurrence quickly dispersed the in-

vited guests, but those resident in the house stood in groups together talking over the circumstance; and no one seemed to think of retiring to rest, when Madame Bereti, having gathered these facts in her progress through the rooms, and, looking for Vera, heard a low voice say, in Russian,

"Oh! Aimée, you might forgive me before we go to bed. You might be kind again. See what nonsense it is girls teasing so. There is poor Alexis for one, and I for another, both half suicides—he because of Nadine's foolish ways; and here are you just the same—offended with me because I think her prettiest, and left you to dance with her. And now she is ill, and Alexis of no good for a long time to come; and I must go to bed, and am so unhappy. We shall be

called directly. Do be all right again before we go, like a dear girl."

No answer but a sob was audible. Olègue melted also; and Madame Bereti left them a few moments to their emotions before she broke in upon them and sent them to rest.

She found Vera leaning on her father's arm, looking pale and tired. She told them what she had just heard. The General laughed heartily, but Vera burst into tears, and ran silently off to bed. Her father looked after her.

"Ah! poor child," said he, "an exciting evening. We must not let such things go on. They would wear her out."

"Yes, indeed," said her governess, "she is soon over excited, and cannot bear much trifling."

"Eh?" said he, as if not aware he had himself addressed her—"Eh? Did you say any one was trifling with her?"

Madame Bereti told him of Madame H.'s conduct, and Vera's distress.

"Meddlesome fools!" he exclaimed. "Good night, my dear Madame."

## CHAPTER V.

DURING several days Alexis's health formed the engrossing topic of all conversations. His fever was so violent that great fears were entertained for him, and, of course, all amusements were stopped. Some of the guests took their departure, and others lingered on, unwilling to leave the family in such anxiety.

Viatcheslav was among the latter. He professed a sudden affection for geography, and was continually coming to examine the large maps that decorated the walls

of the school-room. On one of these occasions he mentioned a Russian poet's description of the country he was studying, and asked Vera if she had seen it. She said she had not; whereupon he proposed to read the poem aloud to the little society. This was agreed to, and, from one poem to another, he went on reading till the shades of evening surprised him and his delighted audience.

He read incomparably well, and it soon became quite the habit for him to read aloud every evening after tea. His choice of books was excellent; and his comments upon them, and the art with which he elicited the comments of his auditors, both bespoke the good critic.

Vera was generally very silent. She seemed only to be fully interested when

any one brought tidings of Alexis; when, according to their tenour, good or bad, she cheered up or looked more sorrowful than before.

Viatcheslav, at last, began to fear that she cared more for her cousin than for anybody else; and sometimes, in despair, would close his book hastily, and, going to the pianoforte, ask her to accompany him in a song, as if he hoped that this change would bring them closer together.

Vera would never attempt to object to the invitation; but, though everyone else thought their voices went very well together, she was never pleased with her singing on these occasions; and, though too unaffected to plead a hoarseness or a sore throat, generally broke down unmistakably at the third verse.

Had not Viatcheslav been thus fully

pre-occupied, he would have been more sensible to the attempts of the incorrigible little Nadine to attract his gallantries. She had already ceased to blame herself for the condition of poor Alexis, and was quite ready to laugh and amuse herself with anyone who would pay her attention.

The lady who had so tormented Vera and Madame Bereti, on the night of the ball, came over to luncheon (as she said) at the time of the family dinner, while Alexis was still ill. She must have been very hungry indeed; for, notwithstanding all her curiosity, she did not ask a word about the invalid until she had finished the last drop of her "tchi," and taken a considerable supply of "kashia" on her plate. Then, turning to her neighbour, she commenced a regular fire of ques-

tions, which the poor General found it very difficult to evade.

Not receiving full satisfaction from him, she applied to others, in hopes of obtaining more information. Nor, baffled on one topic, did she abstain from intrusion into another equally ill-chosen. Leaving poor Nadine's glowing cheeks to cool as best they might, she hastened to make Vera's rival their hue, by ill-bred allusions to the long visit of Viatcheslav, and of the *on dits* she had heard thereupon.

Aimée, little goose, seeing her two sisters look so uncomfortable, and not knowing why, was not pleased to be left out, and drew attention upon herself by upsetting a water-bottle, and calling for the help of the servants.

All the party rejoiced much when the appearance of a boar's head diverted the

interest of the visitor from all other subjects, and occupied her for a good half-hour. The whole repast, however, was rendered wearisome by her presence; and, when it was over, poor Vera regretted that the days were past in which she could have escaped immediately to her school-room. She was now obliged to endure the troublesome curiosity and the unmeaning platitudes that variegated this lady's conversation.

However, Madame Bereti, not forsaking her, continued to inquire into the management of some domestic affairs, such as weaving and embroidery schools for the young peasant girls—on which topic the lady, thinking herself a supreme authority, willingly expatiated.

She was still holding forth thereupon, when the gentlemen sat down to cards;

and being asked to join a party at "Préférence," she did so.

Madame Bereti and Vera, with a quiet sigh of relief, were able then to withdraw.

Fortunately, this unwelcome visitor went away early the next day, but not before she had laid in a sufficient store of remarks and anecdotes wherewith to entertain all her neighbours.

"There," said Vera, as she drove from the door—"there, she is gone to amuse the Comtesse Lvoff, who will not listen to her, and Madame Galoffska who will, with all she has seen, heard, or guessed, about this unhappy affair of poor Alexis. I was so glad, however, to be able to tell her that he was out of danger this morning; for she would gladly have reported that he was dying."

"My dear Vera, you are not apt to be so severe in your remarks."

"No; but I cannot bear her for saying as she does, and will, that Nadine is a coquette. She can't be so at her age, can she?"

"No, my dear, she cannot be what is usually meant by the term. She is but a thoughtless little girl—much too fond of being noticed and of attracting attention, without considering whether she is going out of the place assigned to her by her age in order to do so."

Nadine, who was at a little distance, caught these last words, and blushed violently; but she soon recovered herself, and summoned them all to a sledge-drive, saying that her father had declared it was needful, *pour se desennuyer*, after the visit.

This somewhat incautious remark of the General's found a ready echo in the minds of all; and Viatcheslav already appeared, driving his own little sledge, with its high-stepping black trotter, round to the door, and, jumping out, he busily prepared its fur-covered seats, and stood waiting wistfully for Vera and her father to enter it. The moment they had taken their seats he whirled them off; while the rest of the party stowed themselves into the remaining sledges.

The rendezvous they had appointed was a village, some miles distant, belonging to the General; and the four sledges containing the visitors and children drew up at the door of a very large izba, where they were pressed to enter and partake of the fare of the season—for the carnival had just begun. They de-

termined, however, to wait for the General; for, though his sledge had started first, he had not yet arrived.

The hours passed by; the intendant pressed the party to take a little refreshment. At last some of them consented; while the rest, unable to sit still in the house, wandered up and down on the snow outside, or hung together in groups of two or three, anxious to converse, and yet unable to own their fears.

At length those who were out of doors came in with the information that a horseman, who looked like a messenger, was in sight. All crowded to the door, in breathless anxiety: he was the bearer of only two words—"Come home!"

No time was lost in obeying this mandate; and it was anything but a gay party that issued from the intendant's

house and re-entered the sledges. They were quickly whirled home again, and, with beating hearts, drew up to the door. The servants looked grave, but volunteered no explanation. The questions asked by the eager party were not answered till they pressed forward to the dining-room. There they beheld the General and Viatcheslav stooping over the sofa, where lay Vera. There was also a third person present, watching tenderly over her, whom, when Nadine and Aimée saw, they screamed out "Hélène!" and rushed to meet her. All was joyful confusion, checked only by the condition of Vera, who had fainted but from excess of pleasure on seeing Hélène.

She soon opened her eyes, and, meeting those of Hélène, closed them, as if afraid it was a dream. She put out her

hand feebly ; Hélène held it, and sat anxiously watching hers. No colour came into her face, but a perceptible movement of the nerves showed that life was not suspended. From time to time the poor girl just opened her eyes to close them again. Viatcheslav kept out of her sight, but would not leave the room, and watched the countenances of those around, as if to discover their opinion of Vera's state. At length Hélène said, "Leave us alone together for two hours, and then come back."

These two hours were spent in various ways by the company—some relieved their feelings by ceaseless chattering, some visited the new little niece in her cradle, some sauntered about and discussed everything and nothing, some dined, some smoked, some slept, two

played duets, and one sat by them, listening apparently, but really lifting up her heart to God for her beloved little Vera.

After some time, a pencil note was brought in by Mariuska for Madame Bereti. She rose and went out, crossing the court to Madame Hélène's room. She found the two sisters together.

"Dear Madame Bereti," said Hélène, "Vera has something to say to you, and so have I. Perhaps you will not be very much surprised to hear that Viatcheslav Pavlovitch wishes to carry off our little darling, and that she has said yes. Every one will be told presently; but we could not tell you, who have been everything to her, like anyone else."

Tears of joy choked Madame Bereti's

words as she stooped over the sofa and kissed her darling's fair cheek, whispering blessings on her and Viatcheslav. Vera caught her hand and held it in her own, saying,

"Oh, you knew it—I am sure you knew what he meant to do. If Hélène had not come, I should have told you first of all, after papa."

Hélène then exclaimed, "It is my turn now," and, taking Madame Bereti's hand, embraced and thanked her for all the care she had taken of the little girls; and proposed that Vera should see no one else that night, but should receive congratulations the next morning.

The General would not, however, wait. He had already announced the event to the guests assembled round the cheerful tea-table, and was, to his heart's content,

congratulated by them all. Hélène soon joined him, with Vera, and sent to summon her two little sisters, who were as much delighted as astonished at the news, but could not conceive why Vera should have been so silly as to faint.

"It was not only that," said Nadine, "but Hélène came also."

"No, no," said Aimée to Olègue, "it was *all* about Viatcheslav, and quite absurd, I think!"

"Oh, Aimée, *you* do not know!" said he, with an air of superiority; "but let me go. I must sit by mamma to-night." And he ran to secure the coveted place.

His mother could not, she said, have believed that even Garasavka air could have given so much colour and firmness to the pale little face she had sent away from her so short a time ago.

"Did you come to see Olègue, Hélène?" asked Nadine, presently.

"Partly," replied she, with a peculiar smile, "and partly because I wanted to see papa, and all at Garasavka; also to pay a visit to Svetlana and her baby. I hear it is a very pretty little thing. The baptism is to take place next week."

"Dear papa, have you finished your tea? Then let me come and talk to you a little in your room."

She followed him and his long chibouk into the cabinet, where they had a lengthened conference upon family arrangements —Vera's marriage, Olègue's education, the removal to Kazan, and the prolonged residence of Madame Bereti with Nadine and Aimée.

"I like her, and she suits them," said the laconic General; "let her stay."

"Yes, if she will. You know, however, she is not English—at least, not entirely so; and she is by marriage a subject of the Pope you like so well."

"What can that signify? You are laughing, Hélène. Do you really think that is an objection?"

"Only in case of war, and not then. I was only laughing, as you say; and hope she will stay. She is invaluable to those children."

"What do you think she ought to receive? I have given her nothing yet."

"Give her whatever she asks."

"She will ask nothing. But one cannot act upon that."

"Suppose I take her 500 rubles as her half-year's—"

"My dear Hélène, take her this."

He put a *rouleau* of notes into her hand. She counted them ; they were for 1,000 rubles.

"Papa, you are a dear, liberal papa!" said she, kissing his hand, cheek, and hand again. "It is true, her position is a peculiar one; for she is generally quite alone with the children."

Madame Bereti made many difficulties about receiving so much more than was usual; but Hélène assured her it did her father good to be able to thank her in this way for the successful care she had taken of his little girls. "Shall I have given Miss Rodney 1500 rubles to make them miserable, and not give more to one who makes them happy?"

But, lest any ardent girl should read this, and rush off to Russia, as an El-Dorado wherein she may rapidly earn

enough to repair the ruined fortunes of her family, I must warn any such person that the General was a gentleman of the old school, and of the time when talent of every kind, in Russia, was rewarded most liberally. But all things in that country are, at present, much altered. Western ideas are gaining ground there. English governesses are no longer rare, and they must not expect to obtain *more* than 600 rubles in St. Petersburgh, or 800 in the interior. 1,000 is rarely offered; though, if it be asked, I do not think it would be refused. Even 1500 would be given cheerfully in some cases; that is, far to the east, and under peculiar circumstances. A nurse in the interior receives from 200 to 500 rubles, a nursery governess from 400 to 600. Of course there are exceptions, but such

is the general scale; whilst the arrangements made for them are extremely liberal, and they are sure to be treated with great kindness.

Having finished the consultation with her father, Hélène returned to Vera, whom she found lying in bed, looking very serene and happy—Madame Bereti sitting by her and quietly conversing.

"You will receive a deputation tomorow," said Hélène, smiling, to her sister; "and, after it is over, we will drive to Svetlana's house and pay her a visit of some days. Ivanevna is to be baptized, and we shall find there my little Nathalie, and take her to church for her first communion.

Thus ended this day, so eventful to Vera.

It was not over, however, for Hélène. She had still much to do and arrange.

Midnight found her writing to her husband and to Adrian a full description of Viatcheslav, and of the events that had crowded so rapidly upon her; how, in passing by Svetlana's house, she had found her with a little daughter of ten days old, the news of whose birth —not having been telegraphed or sent by estafette—had not reached her, and was but just known to the General when she arrived at her paternal home. She proceeded to describe where and how she had met her father, the peculiar looks of all the three personages in the sledge, and Vera's speedy transfer to her own carriage. She praised Viatcheslav's looks and manners, and Vera's way of speaking of him. He had been, she said, rather shy and backward in proposing, but was evidently only re-

strained by fear of a refusal; that his anxiety becoming at length too great to be endured, he had intended to propose on the evening of the ball, but Alexis's desperate act happening just after, had prevented his seeking an interview with Vera, while the interest she had shown in Alexis during his illness had misled him; finally, that it was not until quite lately that he had again dared to hope. She then went on to detail the subsequent events, of which the reader may like to hear a more connected account than has yet been given.

When the sledge party drove off on the morning above mentioned, Viatcheslav held the reins, and the General tried to converse with Vera; but her eyes so continually wandered, and her manner was so embarrassed, that he

thought driving would amuse him more than conversation, and asked Viatcheslav to let him try his horse. The young man was very ready to do so; and having, the night before, again asked permission to propose to Vera, lost no time in so doing in the opportunity afforded by the General's rapid driving. Of course it was this rapid driving that made Vera gasp for breath as she looked at him; it was that also that made her head sink on her hands, and her colour rise to crimson, as she announced her assent; it was that too that made her grow as white as the snow around them when they were hailed by Hélène's carriage, and all became like a confused dream of delight as she fainted away. At least so Vera felt, and so she described her feeling to Hélène.

Hélène's letter concluded with remarks on the improved looks of Olègue, and about the studies he was pursuing; and also with messages and various directions to the little flock at home. It is scarcely superfluous to mention, that Miss Rodney had *not* been found necessary to their well-being. She had been comfortably placed in a situation, under a strict injunction to teach, but not to govern, a small family of young ladies.

Nadine and Aimée were in a state of extreme excitement and joy at the idea of going to Svetlana's home, to see her baby baptized, and Hélène's little girl received into the Church; and great indeed was their delight when, on arriving, they found Anna there with her baby-boy. The baptism of this infant had been delayed on account of his godfather's

absence. Great was the interest of the whole party in the three little pets thus brought together for the celebration of the most solemn event of their little lives.

It must here be explained, that baptism in the Greek Church is very seldom delayed beyond three weeks after the birth of a child, and generally takes place sooner.

Early on the following morning, an altar was placed in the drawing-room, and the font in front of the altar. The god-parents stood nearest to it; and, as there were two children to be baptized, the room was somewhat crowded, leaving scarcely a vista for the two smiling mothers who, though precluded from being present, contrived to be more in than out of the drawing-room, and

who, with their husbands, followed the whole ceremony with extreme interest.

Anna's little son and Svetlana's little daughter having been brought in, wrapped only in a rich coverlet, the font was filled with water, poured in at four places, to signify the cross; four lighted tapers were at the same time placed upon the altar, and then commenced the solemn prayers. These lasted some time, during which the poor children grew a little restless, and were less easy to keep inside the coverlets than might have been supposed of such young creatures.

Then came the important moment when, the mantle being unfolded, the little one was taken into the priest's arms and anointed with holy oil; solemn words were then pronounced over

him; he was crossed three times with a wooden image of the cross; and his position being dextrously changed, and his ears closed by the thumb and forefinger of the priest, lest he should be rendered deaf, the child was plunged three times into the font, the priest singing "Let Astafi, the servant of God, be baptized," &c., &c. The infant was then taken back into his godmother's arms—

"The love a cherub, the child a cherubim."

Lightly folded in his mantle, his chrisom, or baptismal garment — a beautiful little shirt put on by the priest—and a golden cross attached to a white ribbon being passed over his head by the same hands, he was borne three times round the altar by his godmother, followed by his godfather. The hair of the child

was then cut in four places, and he was anointed also in four places with the holy chrism, four signifying the cross, and thrice the Blessed Trinity, both being sacred numbers.

Axiana was then baptized, and the whole company pressed forward to kiss and admire Astafi (Eustache) and Axiana, and to congratulate their parents.

"Was it all right?" exclaimed Svetlana, drawing a long breath as she crossed herself rapidly. "Thank God! for I was so anxious, never having been rightly christened myself, you know."

"My dear Svetlana!" exclaimed her husband.

"Oh, yes, it is true. I am not the less your own true little Christian wife, but you can't find Svetlana in the ca-

lendar—it is not a Christian name, and I can't imagine how I got it, though I like it. Still I wished Axiana Ivanevna, to be quite correct, saint's day and all."

"How could you give her such a frightful name?" asked Anna.

"Take care, I shall attack your Astafi directly! I shall have her called Xina for short, so it will not matter; and I must say I think Axiana no worse than Astafi."

"My husband is Christian Astafivitch," said Anna, reproachingly, or at least so she intended her reply should be taken; but the "barogne" sound she had uttered so pompously, excited more merriment than ever; and the whole party moved off to prepare for dinner, and dress the poor babies.

The following Sunday, which was the last before Lent, was selected for the presentation and communion of Hélène's little girl ; little Astafi and Axiana had to wait till their mothers could re-enter the church. Their young aunts were sorry for this; for Astafi being a boy, would not only have been taken from his mother's arms by the priest, and laid at the door of the closed altar, as the little girl was, but would have been carried in and laid upon the altar itself, and thus solemnly dedicated.

The chants on this occasion were very beautiful, and expressive of the solemn joy of a mother in thus bringing her child to God, not to be offered as Isaac, nor to be left in the sanctuary as Samuel, but, being marked with the cross and redeemed by the blood of her Sa-

viour, to be presented as the thank-offering of a grateful heart, and brought up as one of "the company of the First-born."

The usual mass having been performed, Hélène herself received the Holy Communion; and then taking her baby, as if a second time presenting her, held her to receive also this mystical and solemn privilege. It was touching to see the fine old man who officiated, bend over his heavily-jewelled chalice, and take, in the spoon, the smallest portion of the Holy Elements, and gently put them to the lips of the little one; it was touching to see the tears of joy start to the eyes of Hélène, and all around her, as the little creature thus received a blessing she would thus ever remember to have enjoyed. And Madame Bereti, though

she felt much the value of Confirmation and First Communion in the season of early but *conscious* youth, was much struck by this literal obedience to the command, "Drink ye *all* of it."

As the party returned to their rooms, Nadine asked her at what age the children of other countries were admitted to these rites.

"From ten to thirteen in Roman Catholic countries, and from fourteen to twenty in England. In Scotland not before they themselves wish it; and they observe there no Confirmation service, but generally attend a class for instruction for some weeks before they come to the Lord's table. There is nothing extraordinary, however, in meeting a person of twenty or twenty-five who has never partaken of the sacrament of the

Lord's Supper. In England one must be confirmed before one takes the Holy Communion, in the Roman Church one must take the Holy Communion before one is confirmed."

"What is being confirmed?" asked Aimée.

On being informed, they seemed much impressed with the idea of the solemnity of such a ceremony to a young person.

In the evening Nadine again referred to the subject, saying,

"I think it must be easier to be good after such a preparation as that; it must make one *think* more than going to the altar at stated times—because one has done so from one's birth, and because every one else does so."

"I think it is a help. It gives young people a newer blessing and a higher

object in life, just at the very age when they have most difficulties to contend with."

"But we have not that help," said Nadine.

"You might have a still greater help, my dear child, if you really believe that we must have our hearts renewed by the Holy Spirit of God, and that He is given to us in the Holy Sacrament. Who, then, ought to be so strong in His might as you, who have had this blessed aid through all your childish years?"

"Oh! yes, if one had thought about it!"

"It is time to begin, Nadine darling. Shall we converse and read together on the subject during Lent, and thus be better prepared to receive this blessing at Easter?"

"Oh! if you will! I shall care so much more about it!"

Madame Bereti did not forget this excellent means of assisting Nadine in her desire to become better. She recommended her to meditate on the instruction that had been already imparted to her; and although she could not give her such religious lessons as are usual in the Greek Church, and as Hélène had given Vera just before she left her, she could enlighten and instruct her very much by speaking of spiritual blessings, and the right way of meriting and receiving them: in fact, she almost *prepared* her pupil for the rite of Confirmation, which is omitted or incorporated with that of Baptism in the Eastern Church. The anointing with the holy oil after Baptism, signifying

the pouring out of the Holy Spirit by fire, was at one time, by the Eastern Church, separated from Baptism, and made a part of Confirmation. It is now left off altogether in the Anglican Church, and used at both Baptism and Confirmation in Roman Catholic communities.

## CHAPTER VI.

HÉLÈNE, on her return to St. Petersburgh, took Olègue with her; but Vera and her sisters, accompanied by the General, went back to Garasavka, for the observance of Lent.

Vera was particularly anxious, before the great change that was to follow the Easter festival came, to pass the solemn time that immediately preceded it with very rigorous strictness. She fasted, indeed, so severely that she took no food

at all on Wednesdays and Fridays, and on other days only one meal of fish and one of tea and dry bread. The consequence was, that she fainted in church on the second Sunday; so that her father, highly displeased, peremptorily ordered her to eat something every day, and three meals on the "jours gras," as the rest of the week is called, by comparison with the Wednesdays and Fridays.

Very much annoyed at this, she came to Madame Bereti in tears, and said,

"It is of no use. I can't do it if papa does not like it; and yet I feel I *ought* to be more strict this Lent than ever!"

"Because God is giving you a great blessing?"

"Yes, and I am so unworthy of it."

"You will not become the more worthy for being too weak to speak or see."

"Then, don't you think we ought to fast?"

"To obtain command over ourselves in mind and body, yes; to please or to propitiate God, no. St. Paul says, 'he that is weak eateth herbs; not because he is holy, but because he is weak."

"I understand," said Vera. "I thought, when you said something like this a long while ago, that it was because you were not of our Church, and that fasting was not used in yours; but now I see, that as you do and can fast, it cannot be for that. But shall I give up nothing?"

"There are many things that you may deny yourself, Vera, darling, without distressing your father with fears for your health, or injuring anyone."

"Shall I consult Viatcheslav?" said Vera, blushing.

"By all means, dear Vera," said her friend, "and tell me what he says, if you do not dislike doing so."

Vera upon this went to Viatcheslav, and did not re-appear until dinner-time. It did not seem as if her father's admonition had had much effect upon her appetite, for she scarcely ate anything, and Viatcheslav was nearly as bad.

A short time after this repast the latter left the room, and carriage wheels were almost immediately heard.

"You see what he thought," said Vera to her friend.

"What do you mean, dear Vera?"

"That he is gone. He will only return at Easter. We both thought that would be the best kind of privation, and papa said so too."

This last sentence sealed Madame

Bereti's lips, and silenced the expostulations she was about to make upon the very severe trial they had inflicted upon themselves.

During the absence of Viatcheslav Vera endeavoured to eat and speak as usual, but her spirits sank dreadfully; and she was very glad when she saw the little bread-birds and crosses that appeared at breakfast one morning, reminding her that Lent was half over.

"It is the Prostration you know, Vera," said Nadine, "and we shall not have much time for anything else, after three or four hours in church."

In fact, when they returned from this service they were all quite exhausted. There are no chairs in Greek churches, and the services are very long; the fatigue, therefore, is generally great, but

the additional exercises on this day —a prostration of the body being required once or twice in each prayer— was sufficient completely to wear out the strength even of those most habituated to the ceremony.

As one religious observance succeeded another, poor Vera seemed to feel the separation more and more, and needed more than once to be reminded that a cheerful sacrifice was the only one acceptable to God. Viatcheslav sent over an estafette from time to time to inquire how she was, and to bring her letters; his messengers, who had known him long, said that he looked very thin and pale.

So did Vera, and her father suggested to her that Viatcheslav should return for the Holy Week; but this she at

once refused. It is probable, nevertheless, that, with all her endeavours, her thoughts were not as fully bent upon the awful events commemorated as they might have been had Viatcheslav been beside her. But she was doing her best, and we must not doubt that even our weakest efforts are assisted and accepted.

At length the day of Palm-branches (Saturday) arrived, the vigil of the Sunday next before Easter. At about three o'clock in the afternoon the church court was strewn with hazel-branches, having, as Easter was late, a few blossoms. These branches were laid in two rows, and the priest walked between them, reading, or rather reciting, in a low chaunt, the story of the Entry into Jerusalem. They were then carried into the church; and when, some hours later, the vesper-

bell rang, they were sprinkled with holy water, and, lighted with tapers from the altar fixed to their upper twigs, were distributed to every one present. Happy he who succeeded in carrying home his light unextinguished, that he might light therewith his domestic lamp; and happier still he whose branch took fire. He might expect abundant prosperity throughout the ensuing year.

In the evening, while talking of the tenacity with which the Russian peasants adhere to these and such like superstitions, Aimée asked,

"Is it true that there are more of them in our country than in others?"

"There are a great many everywhere; and, though full of instruction, they are disregarded as lessons and degraded into superstitions."

"How so?—what do you mean?" asked Nadine, eagerly.

"Let us take to-day's service as an instance of the beautiful symbolism of your Church, and the blind belief it has produced."

"What do we commemorate on this day? Christ's meek, though triumphant, entry into Jerusalem, riding on an ass, his road strewn with branches of palm-trees, and attended by his disciples, carrying palm-branches, which, as you know, are emblems of victory. Yet our Lord's kingdom was— How did he describe it, Aimée?"

"Not of this world," replied Aimée; "and his triumphant entry was an emblem, you said, of his spiritual kingdom."

"Very well. Those palm-branches, then, may represent Christians. What

did the light on the altar represent?"

"The fire and light of the Holy Spirit, given to the Church on the day of Pentecost," said Vera.

"Therefore, the fire and the light of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who form the Church. Is it not so? And where should that light shine out?"

"In our daily lives at home," said Nadine, gently.

"Yes, and where that is, real blessedness may be expected in domestic circles—gentle and loving hearts, high principles, and holy lives. Where this is the case, the inmates of such homes will be like trees planted by the water's side—bringing forth their fruit in due season."

"Thank you!" exclaimed the two younger girls, "we never knew all this before! How pretty it is!"

"But how far from this is the mere worldly prosperity that is, I suppose, now expected by the people in general, is it not?"

"Yes," said Nadine, laughing—"good crops, long life to their cattle and fat pigs, and no losses at all. But you did not explain why the branches were sprinkled with holy water."

"I suppose it was simply to consecrate them—perhaps, following out the idea that they represented Christians, it might symbolize baptism."

Vera was all this time silent; but a little while later she came close to Madame Bereti, and said,

"I liked all you said so much that I have written it out. May I show it to you? It is in verse—in English verse," said she. "I hope you will like it. It is the first time I have ever tried."

Vera's verses were, for a first attempt, more than tolerable. She had introduced most of the ideas and lessons suggested by Madame Bereti, with one or two allusions of her own to the season of the year, &c. The lines were addressed to some one not named; but very soon afterwards a pink paper, wonderfully like that on which they were written, might be seen constantly peeping out of Viatcheslav's pocket; and it was still there when he re-appeared at Garasavka on Easter-day.

There were masses, vespers, and a third service, every day this week. On Thursday morning Aimée exclaimed to her governess,

"Why is to-day's service called the Twelve Gospels, I wonder? Do we read them all?"

"Aimée," cried Nadine, "there are but four Gospels. Don't you know that?"

"Yes; but do not *you* know, Nadine, that it *is* called so?"

"I know it; but that is because twelve chapters of the Gospels—three of each—containing the whole story of our Lord's Passion and Death, are read to-night. At least so I believe."

"And so I believe, too, Nadine; though I confess I have asked several Russians to explain this to me, and tell me if I was right, who assured me they did not know."

Early on the next morning, our friends went (fasting) to another very remarkable service, in which a kind of leathern banner, with the figure of Christ and the instruments of his torture embossed upon it—the priest walking under it—was car-

ried, like a pall, round the outside of the church, by four gentlemen. It was then laid on an altar in the church, and solemnly kissed by all present, each person holding a lighted taper during the prayers, and laying a small piece of money beside the body of Christ.

Early next day this ceremony was repeated. Both days were fast-days; and, after a slight tea, on the Saturday, the children went to confession, and then read and conversed with Madame Bereti, till the time came for going to church again. They had first, however, begged pardon of every one in the house, in case they should have offended; and Nadine was particularly moved in doing so of Aimée, and in receiving the little girl's ready kiss and forgiveness. She threw her arms round Madame Bereti's neck—

"Oh! do forgive me," she whispered; "and I wish I could ask Miss Rodney to do so too!"

"You can ask God to put it into her heart to do so; but I have no doubt she has long ago forgiven you."

When they arrived in church, (the parish church again,) they found the prayers for those who had confessed going on, and matins followed, as it was just midnight. The four bearers of the leathern banner carried it (the priest walking underneath) to the high altar, where they left it. The choir then desisted, and the priest, coming out from the altar, said, "Peace be with you." With this salutation he brought forth the cross, and blessed the altar and the people; whereupon the cross, the priest, and the choir, followed by the whole

congregation, quitted the church, and proceeded round it singing, the doors being shut. At one of these doors, strongly barred, the priest kneeled down, and prayed for its opening. Three times did he renew his prayer. The third time, addressing the choir, "Christos voskres!" he shouted out, and they immediately intoned the beautiful chant so called. The doors then flew open; the priest entered first, and proceeded to the altar, where he remained till the chants were over. He then, aided by a deacon, led the prayers as usual, and clouds of incense arose around the performance.

Then came the great moment: the cross was twice held up to view, while the priest three times repeated, "Christos voskres." The second time he presented

the cross to the lips of the faithful, who, replying, "Voesteum voskres," first kissed it and then the priest three times. Everyone then turned round and saluted his friend and neighbour with these words, and with three kisses. This went on the whole day—the Commandments being first read, and a short sermon delivered. This service over, all the party returned home to rest, and to dress for the Holy Communion. It was now about three o'clock. At five they again started for church; this time the regular mass was said, and Vera, Nadine, and Aimée all approached the altar and received the Sacrament; Vera with a mind full of awe, yet thinking that she should be aided in the new duties she was about to undertake; Nadine, full of grateful penitence, wonder-

ing how it was that she felt as if it were for the first time so great a privilege had been vouchsafed to her—and Aimée, really anxious to become better, and by finding in the Holy Communion the aid in that rite promised to her.

There were tears on Nadine's long black eyelashes when she returned and knelt down by Madame Bereti. When all had partaken of the divine nutriment the cross and the priest again left the church, around which another procession was formed—on this occasion to bless the provisions, the lamb and pigs ready roasted, the eggs, cheese, butter, milk, and other food untasted since the Lent began.

These edibles were ranged in two rows on the ground circling the church. They were abundantly sprinkled with

holy water, the priest pronounced a benediction on them, and all the congregation dispersed, eager to commence the Easter festivities before retiring to rest.

The family party drew up at the door of the great house, and ate first of some of the blessed food which had been already sprinkled, and then made great devastation in the rich and tempting show of good things spread all down one side of the dining-room: hams and eggs, tongues and chickens, cream and cakes, whole lambs and pigs, in short, all the long-forbidden articles were displayed in appetizing profusion.

Every person gave each a coloured egg, red being the prevailing colour, with the words "Christos voskres" and the threefold kiss, and all sat down to the steaming coffee and hot cream which

were welcomed most gratefully, after the long abstinence.

It was now eight o'clock when all retired to rest, having put away with care the gilt tapers which they had lighted on Thursday evening, and had carried at every service since. The whole party now slept till two o'clock, and then rose to dress for dinner, which took place at four on this day, and consisted of all the luxuries of the season, lamb most especially.

Monday and Tuesday were also great holidays, and much enjoyed. Viatcheslav had come back for a day or two, which restored colour and life to Vera's face, and to his own also.

He disappeared, however, again shortly, and did not return till he came accompanied by his aunt and several other

relations a day or two before the wedding.

These visitors were lodged in a beautiful little house in the garden, kept for highly-honoured inmates, and capable of containing a good many.

Other guests kept, at the same time, flocking in. Hélène and her husband, Prince Tolstoi; Anna and her husband, M. Crassovskine; Svetlana and hers, Comte Verstov; and, to the great surprise and joy of all, the other sister, who had been at Frankfort. She had started as soon as she could after she had received the news, and without warning any of them except Adrien, who had gone to meet her at Warsaw.

"Dear, dear, Pauline! How spirited of her!" they all exclaimed.

She was the second sister; and her

husband, being consul at Frankfort, could not leave his post, so that she had to travel alone. But Pauline was not timid or irresolute; and as soon as she knew that all the brothers and sisters of Vera except herself would be present at the wedding, she determined that there should be no exception at all.

And truly this family meeting was a goodly show; and the General's eyes, albeit unused to tears, were gemmed with dew as he looked at his children—Hélène, so calmly, beautifully serene and fair, the pearl of them all, as he delighted to call her; the animated Pauline, fat, fair, and fresh, from the western world; the happy, tranquil Anna, with her ample person and large ruminating eyes; the gay little butterfly Svetlana, herself still girlish in look; the handsome

little girls, full of the importance of their part in the coming ceremony; and Vera herself, like a white lily amongst them all, so beautiful in her sweet varying colour and confusion. And then his sons—four noble young fellows, looking almost as proud of their sisters—of Vera especially—as he himself felt. Adrien, however, found time to take care of Tais, and Ivan showed many little delicate attentions to a beautful girl, Mademoiselle Tssafoich, whom, by-the-bye, he soon afterwards married.

Viatcheslav had no such battalion of brothers and sisters to show, but he gladly adopted all Vera's relations, down to Alexis and Olègue, who seemed to think they had renewed their old rights to Nadine and Aimée, and were ludicrously exact copyists of older *devoués* in their manner to them.

"To-morrow, to-morrow, I shall not look at you, Olègue!" exclaimed Aimée.

"Who will you dance with, then?" asked Olègue, drily.

"With Viatcheslav, of course," replied Nadine. "Don't you know that I am his only unmarried sister!—I mean that we are," said she, correcting herself, amid the general laugh.

"Vera, darling, are you awake yet?" asked Anna's voice, early the next morning—"I want to speak to you—"

"And so do I," added Svetlana, behind her.

This rather frustrated Anna's intentions of giving Vera some good advice. Hélène, however, divining their purpose, sent to invite them to her room for coffee, where Pauline would make it *à la bourgeoise Allemande*. There, indeed, they found

Pauline, picturesquely attired, merry and laughing, full of stories about the good German hausfrau style of living. They all soon became busy in several feminine objects of interest, viz., Pauline's wardrobe and Vera's wedding-dress. Seeing them thus engaged, Hélène passed quickly across the court, and asked Vera to come out with her in the garden. In order to commune the more lovingly and tenderly with this dear sister, she chose a quiet remote walk, and all that she said had a wonderful effect in calming her agitation and sustaining her courage.

"Oh! Hélène," said Vera, "how shall I do right?"

"Make God your first and your husband your next object, darling, and have faith, full faith—so shall you be led safely. You are happy, my child, that Viatche-

slav is one whose love goes upwards."

She said but little; yet what she did say had the desired effect, and Vera returned home quiet and refreshed.

Tais and her other friends soon came round her, and Pauline was not long in getting a word with her also.

"Vera," said she, "I think you had better get Viatcheslav to enter the diplomatic line. He is fit for it, and you would not be buried, as Anna and Svetlana are, in a country life and mere household cares."

"Thank you, dear Pauline; but I am not quite sure that he would like it, and I am not at all sure that I should—so soon—and to go away from you all! I think it will be pleasanter at Cinevka; and I am sure he does not need occupation—he is always so busy."

"But look at Anna and Svetlana!"

"They are very happy. Svetlana is as gay as a bird, and always good-humoured. And so shall I be, you will see, dear Pauline. Are your Germans so very delightful?"

Pauline, recollecting her own strictures upon them, laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks.

Vera's excitable spirits found vent also in tears; and Svetlana, looking for them to come and admire the trousseau, found them both in tears.

"Ah, ah!" said she, "what is the matter?"

"The fact is—" Pauline tried to explain, but she was overcome by another irresistible fit of laughter at the recollection of the cause of their apparent distress.

"Ah, well! come then now!" exclaimed Svetlana, "to dinner first, and to the trousseau afterwards.

A servant at this moment met them with a message that Hélène was not very well, and would dine in her room if Vera Nicolaievna would keep her company.

Hélène really was not well, and Vera was so thankful to escape, with her red eyes, into the ever-ready sheltering-nest of her fond sister's love.

Pauline, satisfied that there was not much the matter, queened it at the head of the table.

Then came the whole flock of ladies and little girls, and after them the gentlemen, to inspect the trousseau. It was very beautiful—rich in *matinées*, embroidered or quilted for various seasons; in *broderies* and *lingeries* of all sorts; in lace

and in cachemeres; in rich silks not yet made up—for it was wisely thought better not to make up all in one year's fashion; feathers, and many furs, and other articles, always valuable and acceptable, were also in abundance.

Her father's first present of two beautiful carriages stood in the court; his second, of a magnificent set of gold and silver plate, was not yet arrived; and his third, of a splendid pearl necklace, was reserved to be clasped on by his own hands after the ceremony.

A father's rich and constant gifts to his daughters are among the most graceful of Russian customs, and by such presents during life mitigate a good deal the severity of the laws of inheritance.

While everyone was admiring this rich and brilliant store, Vera slipped quietly

away, begging Madame Bereti to come with her.

"I want to be quiet for a moment," whispered she; "I am very happy, but it is all confusion, and my head aches. What is the matter with me?"

"Nothing, darling," said her friend; "but you want a little air and rest. Let us come home, and you had better lie down a little while."

Vera did so, and her friend at her request stayed with her, conversing and reading one or two verses from the Scriptures, just to quiet her, for she was very much excited.

Presently, however, Xivrea came to ask her something about her dress for the evening, and then Madame Bereti said she would return to the little girls.

When she came back she found that Vera had been carried off by her sisters, and Tais, to receive their presents; and that all the maids of the place had begged leave to come in and kiss her hand.

All this day had been one of very happy fussing and fidgetting; Vera herself had spent it, as we have seen, in long interviews with her sisters and friends. She had scarcely seen Viatcheslav.

The children were in great spirits—Nadine certainly a little sad when she thought of Vera's leaving her, but she soon recovered her spirits again.

"Ah! Nadejda Nicolaievna," said Xivrea to her, "Vera Nicolaievna leaves you now. She will never be the same again."

"Nonsense, Xivrea, how can you be so silly! She is not going away. She will be just as before. Why, ever since she has been seventeen she has not been so much with us. You know she will certainly be just the same."

And two large drops fell from her eyes as she spoke.

"Dura, dura!" cried she, "you have made me quite stupid too! Do go along and look for my white gloves—I have a whole dozen somewhere. And take these shoes with you and give me the little brown boots."

So saying, she kicked off the white shoes she had been trying on, and, leaping up, danced in her stockings, while Xivrea muttered, "It will be her turn next," and went to fetch the dainty little "brodequins."

One or two such scenes had occurred in the course of the day. Once she had burst in upon Madame Bereti, and had found her upon her knees. When she rose hastily, Nadine saw that her tears were flowing, and her own instantly leapt forth.

"Dear child," said Madame Bereti, "I wish you had not come in. I did not wish to infect you in this way."

But Nadine, feeling a twinge of jealousy that anyone but herself should dare weep over Vera, would not listen, and broke away, exclaiming, "So stupid! crying for nothing!"

In the evening they all assembled in the saloon. Aimée, enchanted with her pink dress, and with the dignity of having her short hair gathered with a pink net, was in ecstasies. Vera looked

a little pale, but very pretty in a white dress with a wreath of white rosebuds, and Nadine showed off her pink costume better even than Aimée, as she was much darker.

When the dancing was over, and the General was saying "good night" to his children, he drew Vera to him, and held her long to his heart, leaning down his cheek upon her head. When he at last released her, with a fervent "God bless thee, my child!" Vera saw, through her own tears, that her father's cheeks were wet also.

This quite overcame her. She pressed closely to him, and leant upon his arm, while deep convulsive sobs shook her slender little figure.

"Come with me, my child," said her father, tenderly. "Never fear, Viat-

cheslav—it is nothing." And he took her into his own room, and, after a little while, he summoned Madame Bereti to take her upstairs.

"Forgive me for sending for you. She is in no state to go alone, or to be left to her maids," said he, courteously.

'Certainly a Russian gentleman *is* a gentleman,' thought Madame Bereti, who would have considered it only a compliment to have been asked to do anything for Vera, her own darling pupil.

She had much wished to have a little conversation with her this last night, but felt that her kindness would be best expressed by silence, and by remaining with her to keep out other people with similar fond intentions. And this was not a superfluous precaution; for there came to the door, in succession, Pauline Nico-

laievna; Anna Nicolaievna and her husband, Christian Astafivich; Svetlana and her husband, Ivan Petrovich; Madame D——, the mother of Ivan of the eggs; Madame C——, the lady who had been so prophetic; the sister of Viatcheslav, the aunt of the General, and a number of others, all with some important suggestions for the poor little trembling bird just about to quit the parental nest.

Hélène did not come. She had, on the contrary, begged her sisters to abstain from troubling Vera, but in vain.

Probably no one slept much that night; for up to two o'clock messages continued to arrive, and at daybreak only was the house really quiet. Madame Bereti sat beside her charge, and thought much and hopefully upon the change awaiting her. Her new home was not far off—they

would see her often; her husband was a thoroughly high-principled and religious man, wiser than the brilliant and brighter than the sensible often are. While Vera slept she prayed for her, that *she* might herself be ever guided in her daily path, and might be a good, and true, and pleasant wife to him. And when she saw her fast asleep, she left her, to get a little of the same cordial balm for herself; but, ere long, the children awoke and chattered, and went into Vera's room and talked to her.

"Perhaps the best thing for her," thought Madame Bereti. "I will not send them away just yet."

But when eight o'clock struck, she thought it time they should dress, and, going in, found Vera very calm and cheerful, laughing at Aimée, who had

put on her beloved pink chernille net with her dressing-gown.

The labours of the toilette were partly over when coffee was brought in. Then ensued the great and important business of dressing the bride. No servant nor married person was allowed to touch her; her sisters Nadine and Aimée, with Tais, put on every article of clothing. Whilst, however, she yet remained in her dressing-gown, Anna's sister-in-law came to arrange her hair, for the others were too young and unskilled to perform this delicate piece of work.

The veil, a triangular one of Brussels lace, leaving her face partially uncovered, and a wreath of orange flowers having been placed on her head, Adrien entered and put on her white slipper,

with a piece of gold in it, which would at the end of the day be his perquisite.

Little Olègue begged hard to be allowed to perform this ceremony, but Adrien would not resign a privilege which belonged to him.

"All their mothers," he said, had agreed that, as he was the nearest to Vera in age, this function should be his; but that Olègue might succeed to it on Nadine's or Aimée's marriage.

"No," said the little man, "I shall not have the heart to do it for Nadine, and I intend to marry Aimée myself."

This speech of his had been uttered the day before, in the great hall where the gentlemen were smoking, and had produced much merriment amongst them.

After Adrien had left the room, Nadine put on and laced up Vera's beautiful white dress, all moire, and lace, and loveliness, as Adrien, who had seen it awaiting her, deposed. She wore no ornament except a plain locket and chain, which, as it contained her mother's hair, she never took off; and when Aimée had given her her gloves and handkerchief, she was quite ready to proceed, accompanied by her bridesmaids, all in white but not dressed alike, to the grand saloon, at the upper end of which was spread a beautiful little carpet of Aimée's work, before which stood the two sets of parents, her father and Hélène, and another couple called Pére-assis and Mère-assise, who act as godfather and godmother to the young couple; for their own parents—in

order, it is said, to prevent coercion—are allowed to play but a very inferior part in wedding ceremonials.

Vera, the moment she entered, moved hastily forward, and knelt on the carpet before her father, who blest her, making the sign of the cross; after which she rose, kissed his hand, cheek, and hand again, then went to her sister and knelt before her.

Hélène then blessed her and gave her an image to kiss. Upon this Vera rose, kissed her hand also, and performed the same ceremony before the other couple.

The bridegroom, meanwhile, was going through the same process of kneeling, blessing, and kissing, with his parents in their apartments.

This ceremony over, a message was brought to Vera that Viatcheslav was

waiting for her in the church. On receiving this intimation, Vera, accompanied by her three bridesmaids, Nadine, Aimée, and Tais, proceeded to the carriage, and were conveyed to the sacred edifice.

The rest of the company followed, with the exception of the General and Hélène, who remained at home to receive the young bride and bridegroom on their return with bread and salt, the truly beautiful emblems of hospitality and abundance.

When Madame Bereti, who was in the last carriage, entered the church, the marriage service was already being read, and Viatcheslav and Vera were standing before the priest at the steps of the altar.

Having asked if they wished to be married each to each, he placed the

ring on the finger of each, with a solemn blessing.

Vera was very pale, and Viatcheslav scarcely less so, but both attended devoutly to the service, during the chants and beautiful prayers which followed.

A small temporary altar was now brought out into the body of the chapel, and the wedding party moved from the high altar and stood before it. The priest placed himself on the right hand of Viatcheslav, and the paranymphs being immediately behind them, he held over the head of each a gilt crown; gilded tapers were then lighted and put into the hands of both bride and bridegroom; the bridesmaids stood near them, but the four paranymphs were their real attendants.

A cup of wine was now presented to the

espoused couple, from which they drank three times. Joyous chants then filled the air, and made Vera's heart beat, especially when she and Viatcheslav, having their hands tied together with a silk handkerchief, were conducted by the priest three times round the little altar, their paranymphs following them, and bearing their crowns and tapers behind them.

A very soft, joyous chant accompanied this part of the ceremony, which constitutes the positive binding together of man and wife, in the name of the Blessed Trinity.

A bible was now presented to the newly married pair to kiss. This being done, they were untied, solemnly blessed and, the great event over, the whole company returned home.

Much embracing followed, but the trying scene in the vestry, and also those of the settlement signing, were spared Vera. Having no idea how much she had escaped, she was nevertheless very glad when she found that no business was required of her, and that she was allowed, moreover, to sit quietly at the side of the immense banqueting board, between Viatcheslav and Hélène, the Mère-assise still presiding at the festivity.

The place of Viatcheslav and Vera was marked out and overshadowed by a magnificent orange-tree, standing on the ground, and coming up through a circular aperture in the table.

The ladies sat all on the left, the gentlemen on the right of the Mère-assisé. The Paranymphs had a table to

themselves, yet were not supposed to eat, but to career round the room, giving out hints, and directing the distribution of the wine.

A brass band, the same that had played the night before, sounded a gay clarionic charge as soon as the healths were given out, and the little bride sat under her orange tree wishing each might be the last.

It was over at length, this gorgeous *déjeûner*, and, breaking into little talkative groups, all the ladies went to rest somewhere, generally in each other's rooms, while the gentlemen smoked and dozed, and talked till all had to dress again for the evening.

Vera spent her time with Hélène, while Pauline, Anna, Svetlana, and their guests flitted about; and all the children

resorted to Nadine's room, to chatter and play, till they too were again called to be dressed.

At about eight o'clock the whole party met again for the evening. Gay were the toilettes, bright the looks, and brilliant the whole scene.

It was thoroughly enjoyed; the children danced like true Russians, and a gallaxy of young beauties, splendidly dressed, indulged also in the mystic mazes of waltz, polka, reel, and quadrille, making the suite of illuminated apartments quite like a fairyland of pleasure.

Hélène was afraid Dmitri would find all this very painful. But no, he was looking very much amused, talking to Nadine and Madame Bereti. Ivan

Petrovich, just as she was making this remark, came up to her.

"Do look at Dmitri Georgevich," said he, "is it to Nadine Nicolaievna, or her governess, he is speaking?"

"I do not know," answered Hélène, smiling.

"Do you see Ivan Nicolaivitch with the pretty Issafoich?—and Adrien Nicolaivich with Tais Georgevna? Bah! we shall have more weddings!"

"And did you see," asked Hélène, laughing, "Axiana Ivanevna, and my Olègue?"

He laughed in return, for she had mentioned his own little infant daughter, whose innocent and impartial smiles shone on all who approached her.

The arch-gossip who had tormented Vera so much at Christmas was still

more ready than the giddy Ivan to pry into the future, and assured Madame Bereti that it was easy to see that Dmitri adored Nadine, child as she was, and that in a very few years she would console him in the midst of all his griefs.

Madame Bereti replied that she hoped Nadine would be many years older before anyone talked so of her.

Poor Madame Bereti! she little knew that her very natural reply was to be made use of against her. But so it was, as we shall see.

Vera looked lovely; joy and excitement gave her a beautiful colour, and every time Viatcheslav looked at her, he looked more and more superlatively happy.

Dancing was kept up till three in the

morning; when Vera was conducted to her new home, by all her four elder sisters, and Viatcheslav's aunt.

Thus ended the wedding-day!

The next morning, le jour des femmes mariées, all went in gay and pretty toilettes to drink coffee with the new couple. Vera, smiling and looking very conscious of her delicate little matronly cap, did the honours very charmingly.

Driving out and dancing a day longer completed the festivities. After this the guests dispersed, leaving Vera and Viatcheslav to spend some time at Garasavka, thence to make a tour of visits, before finally settling at his own place.

Nadine and Aimée were thus gently broken in to the separation from their

sister; and as Hélène and Pauline remained, the house continued to be very cheerful, even after the other sisters and the brother were gone.

## CHAPTER VII.

"MON CHER," said Hélène to her husband, a day or two after the close of the marriage festivities, "do you observe how Olègue is spoilt here? He has lost his modest manner, and is bold and forward; he is too much noticed and listened to."

"We cannot expect everyone to be as temperate as we are," answered Prince Tolstoi; "others, who have less interest in children use them as puppets, make

them show off when they are in the humour to be amused, and think they can put them quietly back into their box afterwards. Whereas, we parents, thinking always of the *child*, may be mistaken, but not in this careless way."

"We are therefore, I think," returned Hélène, "wrong to leave our boy here; and besides, when my father moves to Kazan, it will be no better for his health than St. Petersburgh, and this house will be shut up."

"Shall we ask Anna to take him in?"

"He would be petted and get dull there, I fear, and his tutors would disturb Christian Astafivich."

"And I would not leave him at Svetlana's, to be spoiled. Dmitri offered to receive him and his tutor, if the

General did move to Kazan," said her husband, "and his house is very quiet; but it is too much to ask, though he says it would interest him."

"I believe it would; but then shall I offer to take Tais with me to St. Petersburgh?"

"To throw her in Adrien's way?" asked her husband, maliciously.

"No, no, she is but a child, of Nadine's age—in fact, I wish she could go with Nadine and Aimée, and be under that excellent Madame Bereti. I really believe Dmitri would accept that for her, but I must speak to papa first."

"Do so, for it is a good idea. If he allows you to send Tais with your little sisters, I shall have no scruple in letting Olègue go to him; he will not spoil him."

"And if papa proposes to leave Olègue and his tutor here?"

"Refuse: I should not like the solitude for him."

The General, on being informed of the plan, entered into it heartily. He was ready, he said, to leave open house for Olègue, if they thought it advisable, or to take him to Kazan, but that he fully considered Dmitri's offer one that should not be refused.

"And I am sure," added he, "that Madame Bereti will take his sister in the place of my little Vera, and do her as much good. I will go and speak to her about it myself."

It was well that Madame Bereti liked the plan and Tais; for as the proposal was made openly before Nadine and Aimée, who screamed with joy, her

refusal would have been somewhat difficult, and very annoying to both parties.

As for Dmitri, he was very much pleased with the arrangement; he shrank, however, from the separation, and so did Tais herself; and both insisted that it should not take place until the day the General's family actually started.

Ten days passed on, and Vera and Viatcheslav were already gone on their tour of visits, when Pauline, who had just returned from paying several visits on a smaller scale, came into the school-room, and said mysteriously to Madame Bereti,

"Can you come and speak to me?"

Madame Bereti, leaving Nadine at the pianoforte, and Aimée at her desk, went out into the bright May morning sunshine with Pauline, who led the way to the garden, saying, as she did so,

"Don't think me rude or interfering, but having heard you talked of and criticised, I think it best to warn you of what is said. Rumours have met me on many sides, that you are too popular in society, and that Dmitri Georgevich in particular admires and courts you, and is likely to marry you."

"Aprés?" said Madame Bereti, quietly.

"I of course defended you as a friend, and declared that I was sure you had no such thoughts—that you could not help being agreeable, as nature had made you so—and that there was no harm done if Dmitri did admire you. At the same time, I think it kind to let you know what is being said."

"Thank you," said Madame Bereti. "I am sure you thought so; but as M. Dmitri is always very kind and atten-

tive to me, and nothing more, it will not be easy to make any change, nor is any required. I cannot think how this foolish report could have arisen."

"Oh, as to that, somebody declared that you had yourself resented the idea that Nadine was the attraction that drew him so often to the school-room party, and to Garasavka when there is scarcely any one here."

"The amusement of his sister Tais is a more likely reason than the charms of either Nadine or her governess," said Madame Bereti, laughing. "It is too absurd; however, I thank you, Madame Pauline, very much, and shall remember your kindness."

"We are, you know, soon going to Kazan, which will effectually bury all such reports in oblivion."

Saying this, she returned to the children; but the conversation left a disagreeable impression upon her mind, which became so strong by brooding over it, that she was almost determined to mention it to Hélène.

"It would have been just as well," thought she, "if I had not undertaken Tais; but one cannot foresee everything, and it seemed to be right and kind to assist the arrangement for little Olègue as much as I could."

There seemed, however, to be no need of taking any steps in the matter, for the General was preparing for departure, and it was therefore to be hoped that the idle tongues in the neighbourhood of Garasavka would soon find something else to occupy them.

The General himself seemed to be

rather excited, and always on the look-out for messengers and letters. His daughters had never seen him thus, and Pauline was quite anxious about it. Her sister told her to dismiss her fears; she had, however, already infected Aimée and Svetlana with them, and they had come over consequently several times, quite curious and anxious to know what was going on. Aimée, at the same time, took notice of a great deal of whispering among the subordinates; and Nadine *felt* that her sisters were in expectation of something she knew no more than they did of *what*.

One night, however, they all heard the arrival of a carriage, but nothing further, till the next day at dinner, when they found a very handsome officer, in a splendid uniform, talking to

the General, and heard orders given for the General's travelling-carriage to be ready directly after dinner.

"Where can papa be going?" asked the little girls of each other.

Hélène came in dressed for travelling, and Pauline also.

"Where are *they* going?" thought Nadine.

At dinner the General gave the health of the Emperor, and of his guest who sat beside him. Hélène's husband proposed that of the Ambassador to Japan, at which the General chuckled joyously, and returned thanks for his Excellency.

"I wonder," said Aimée, aside to Nadine, "what it all means?"

"And I wonder what all that noise is about—look, Aimée, the court is full

of people! Oh, they are come to wish us *bon voyage.* No, they are screaming out something!—what can it be?"

"Ah, papa is coming; we may go to the window!" exclaimed Aimée.

The guests, indeed, all crowded to the door and windows; the court was full—the carriage had just come to the door—the General and his friend were about to step into it—when peasants in throngs surrounded them with groans and cries of "Justice! justice! justice! Emancipation! Down with the oppressors!"

Angry faces and menacing voices raged around them on all sides.

The children grew pale, and everyone looked alarmed and agitated, except the General himself, who, springing upon the carriage seat so as to be both seen and heard, addressed the people.

For the first few seconds he was not heard. Cries of "Emancipation!" "Down with the oppressors!" "He is trying to escape from us!" "We are no longer in the time of the Velmojes!"—and murmurs among his own party, "What does this mean?" "By ——, it looks serious!" "There are hundreds joining it!" "What is the General going to do?" &c., &c., drowned his voice; but at length his intention was perceived, and his fine manly figure, noble countenance and bearing, commanded attention. These are the words he spoke:

"My children! sons and daughters of Garasavka! What do you want? What is your complaint? Have you too little bread? I will give you more. Have you had misfortunes? I will relieve you. Do you ask for liberty?

You know I give it freely to everyone who can write to ask for it, or can read and sign the agreement. There are schools, and in a few years all will be free who are able to support themselves. Would you have me free the rest—the old, the helpless, the children? Shall I no longer feed and shelter them? Whence could they pay rent? What is the *corvée* they do for me? Shall I cease to feed them for this?—call them free, and leave them to your care or their own?

"No, this I can never do; while you are obedient, I will be faithful. Leave you? I do so to serve our great father, the Czar, whom God has given to us. Glory to God! I leave you to go and speak to him. He bids me go, to make the name of Russia great among

the men of Japan—men who often go naked, and know not God. Glory to God!

"I am not going to Kazan as you suppose, but much farther; still, I will not cease to care for you, to give you good things to eat, and vodka and freedom to all who are fit for them. But if you *dare* to make any disturbance, I wish you joy of it; you will indeed live to repent it. You know me—you know I am true to my word!"

Accustomed to bow down to authority, the poor crowds were retreating quite abashed, when he spoke again:

"Nay, let us part good friends. Trifonivich" (his intendant) "shall give you a dance near the woods this evening, and some vodka to drink my health as ambassador to Japan."

"Long live the General!" "God preserve the Emperor and the ambassador to Japan!" "Long live Vera Nicolaievna and Viatcheslav Pavlovich Putiatine!"

And away they went, blessing all the Nicolaieviches and Nicolaievns; while the General's carriage drove rapidly past, making them elbow each other out of the way to open a passage for it to pass.

The officer and Prince Tolstoi accompanied the General.

Hélène and Pauline were to follow him later.

The former hastened, as soon as the colour had come back to her little sister's cheeks, to explain to them that her father had much wished to obtain this very honourable post, and had endeavoured to do so before the govern-

ment of Kazan had been offered him; that thinking that offer had been made him by way of refusal of his higher hopes, he had accepted it. But that powerful interest had in the meantime been made at court by Prince Tolstoi and others, to obtain for him the embassy, so much better suited to his taste and qualifications; that the officer who had brought these tidings was an old friend of Prince Tolstoi's, and had therefore come himself to be the bearer of such pleasant intelligence.

"And what is to happen to us?" asked the children very naturally, and rather dismally.

"Papa has not quite settled; but he is not far off yet—he is only gone to St. Petersburgh."

Madame Bereti had heard all this

conversation, yet was not thoroughly interested in it.

Certain voices among the crowd of peasants had cried out, "Who sent away Zenobia?" and others, "Long live Dmitri Georgevich, and Eva Vladimirevna!" And the two cries, so different in their import, fell with almost equal dissonance on her ears. So lost in thought was she, that when Hélène spoke to her she started.

Hélène smiled as she said, "I have sent away the children with Pauline, because I must speak to you. Of course the Kazan plan is over, and my father will not take the children to Japan—at all events, not till affairs are more settled there; yet I think I can make it very endurable to you to come with them to St. Petersburgh, and to live

with us. Tais might also accompany us, and Olègue remain with Dmitri."

At this name a perceptible colour rose in Madame Bereti's cheeks; she hesitated, but Hélène said kindly and earnestly,

"Do not let any idle folly carelessly reported annoy you, nor think of those wild cries just now. But if you will allow me, I have something which I ought to tell you."

Madame Bereti begged her to proceed, and thanked her for her kindness.

"Since Dmitri left us," said Hélène, "he has written to ask me to plead with you for him; he said he could not believe you really disliked him, and that if so, he must at all events hear it from yourself."

"But, Madame la Princesse M. Dmitri is so young, and he has never when speaking to me, approached any but the most general subjects of conversation. I was in hopes you had not heard these foolish reports. I cannot think what gave rise to them."

"I must say no more," replied Hélène; "but I think it probable that Dmitri's admiration is more visible to others than to yourself. Papa told me of it long ago. And neither he nor I can see the discrepancy of age you mention. What is your age, Madame Bereti?"

"Twenty-seven; I have been four years a widow."

"And he is thirty! He married at twenty-five, and lost his wife at Ta's birth, three years and a-half ago. Poor

man! I never saw such grief; he never recovered his spirits till he met you. But I have no right to urge you—forgive me," said she, taking her hand caressingly.

This conversation made much impression upon Madame Bereti, and that night she sat up late, reading her journal, and recalling the events of the last few months. The thought of going to St. Petersburgh certainly did not delight her as it formerly had done; but then she reflected that this was perhaps on Vera's account. She had lamented to Hélène poor Vera's hard fate, in just seeing the re-union of the children with her favourite sister, only to see it the moment after broken off.

But Hélène replied gravely, that it was good often to separate those who

cling together, that the younger and weaker might learn to do without support; whilst, on the other hand, those disposed to be solitary and independent were often caught and caged by a thousand little necessities, linking them to others, and teaching them that it is not good for man to live alone; that he must receive help, and give it.

"You have done Vera immense good," added she, "and perhaps she would have profited less had she had her old prop to lean upon. Nadine is also improved; but for Aimée, perhaps the salutary fear she has of my person may not be useless. I am glad also to remove them from this place—all is not quiet here yet, I fear."

These words recurred to Madame Bereti as she sat alone that night; it

was late, and yet she felt too thoughtful to lie down. Whilst in this mood, the stillness of sleep, as it were, enveloping the house, suddenly a noise, as of something moving inside the wainscoting, struck her ear; and remembering to have heard that rats forsake a falling house, she felt a little alarmed, but not seriously; till, on crossing a passage to the children's room, she smelt a strong smell of fire, and saw flames shooting up through the flooring of their dormitory. To take them out of bed, wrap them hastily in cloaks, and convey them to the other wing of the house, was the work of a few seconds. She then returned to Hélène's room, and as the Princess was to start early in the morning, she found her on her bed dressed and fast asleep.

Madame Bereti called her and Pauline both up; informing them of the fire, and where it had broken out, she then ran to the great bell and rang it. Upon this alarm the servants came hurrying to save the furniture; and they had barely time to do so, for the whole wing was in flames. Olègue, and all the dependents of the family, slept in an outer wing, at a safe distance; so that when the four sisters and Madame Bereti were assembled in the blue saloon there was not much to be done, except, indeed, to set the servants to their respective tasks of supplying water to quench the fire, and of carrying off the most valuable articles of furniture from the building which was threatened with destruction.

The court was now getting pretty

full; at first it was thought that the people had assembled there to offer their assistance, but it soon appeared that they were swayed by far different feelings. Whether the intendant had given them too much vodka or not, it is difficult to say, but pilfering was going on in all directions; and Madame Bereti stopped Zenobia, as she was carrying off a beautiful cloak belonging to Pauline.

The girl, on being thus detected, shook her fist at the governess—

"You dare!" she exclaimed; "you dare touch *me*! You spoilt my wedding, and I'll spoil yours! I'll get you sent away—you sent me on a fool's errand to a burning tree; I'll pay you off for it yet. Let me go—you had best!"

But Madame Bereti held her fast.

"I had nothing to do with your marriage," said she, "and I don't know what you mean about mine—I am a widow. Take care, don't struggle so, but just come out of the way of that burning plank, will you;" and with great coolness, she drew the girl out of the way of a blazing rafter, that would have certainly fallen on her.

A shout of applause followed; but Madame Bereti, unmoved by shouts or praise, held her prize till Trifonivich arrived with the fire-engine, to whom she delivered up her prisoner.

Hélène, who had driven to a neighbouring hill, to witness the spectacle of the flaming house, now drove into the court again; the engines were then beginning to play, but they had been so long coming that it was evident one-

half the mansion would be reduced to ashes.

The fire, it was soon ascertained, had originated in an empty room, that had been Vera's—it was just below Nadine's; neither fire nor candle had been lit there for three weeks, and the door being kept locked, no one had entered it. It was, however, remarked that the window had been broken the night before. The housekeeper had noticed this, and had sent word to the glazier to get it mended, attributing the fracture to mere accident.

It was painful to suspect any one. Trifonivich, however, did suspect his captive as soon as he heard of the broken window, and turning to her said suddenly:

"I shall take you to the priest un-

less you confess whether you did, or did not, throw fireballs into that room."

The girl, on this unexpected interrogation, turned very pale, but denied the charge conveyed in the question.

"Princess," said the intendant, approaching Hélène, "pray command the priest to be called, and that search be made in this wretched girl's home."

"Take her to the priest; or, stay, I will question her first."

Hélène then addressed the supposed culprit in a few stirring words, recalling to her her ancient fealty and special affection for Vera, and asked her what Vera Nicolaievna would think of her fine promises now? Confess," added she, "and I will beg my father to forgive you; he loves his people, and will gladly receive all into favour again. If

you have any accomplices persuade them to confess also. Has anyone here," she continued, raising her voice, "assisted to set Garasavka on fire?—to injure their good master?"

"No, no, no!" cried a hundred voices at once; but Zenobia stood mute and sullen.

"Go and search the village for fire-balls, and bring me all you can find," said Hélène.

Several among the crowd, in obedience to this order, started on the search.

"Zenobia," said she, laying her hand gently on the girl's arm, "do you remember when you learnt to say, 'Ochi Nash' with me? You always used to speak the truth then, Zenobia!"

The gentle tone, and the remembrance of earlier days at this appeal, touched

the girl's heart. She knelt down at her mistress's feet, and kissed her hand, crying out,

"Oh, forgive me! forgive me!—miserable, ungrateful wretch that I am!—for I have no accomplices; none saw me do the deed—I alone did it. Do not tell the priest nor the master. I did it to spite Eva Vladimirevna. Kill me!—kill me!—kill me!—oh, monster that I am! What shall I do?"

"Confess to God and to the priest, and help now to put out the flames," said Hélène, "and to save the property."

At this moment a group of persons rushed into the court, dragging with them a young man who held something in the folds of his smock-frock.

"He has found a fire-ball — a fire-

ball!" cried the rest; "and he will not say where. Cemon will not say where he found it! Ask him yourself, Kniginia. Ask him, Sudraina."

But Hélène encountered such a glance from Cemon's eyes, that she immediately understood and respected his motive, recognising in him a constant but unfavoured lover of Zenobia's. She, therefore, only said,

"Take her home, and take care of her."

An hour or two afterwards the Princess saw Zenobia and Cemon mounting guard over chests of drawers, trunks, and other articles of furniture, which she knew came from the rooms of Madame Bereti and the children, and a very good understanding seemed to be established between them.

Meanwhile the fire continued to rage, the servants to hurl articles out of the windows, and the children to run about the court in night-dresses and cloaks—Hélène, Pauline, and Madame Bereti looking on calmly: calmness in great events, and excitement under little ones, being strongly-marked features of the Russian character.

This fire had altered considerably the domestic arrangements of the family.

"The wings would do for you to inhabit," said Hélène to Madame Bereti, "but the experience of to-day and last night convinces me that we must not leave you here alone. The evil spirit *may* be happily exorcised for ever, but we must not trust to that. As soon as the fire is extinguished I shall therefore carry you off to Anna's house;

from thence I will go to Dmitri and fetch Tais, and then your removal to St. Petersburgh may be effected at once. But give me some answer for poor Dmitri, will you not?"

Seeing that Madame Bereti hesitated, Hélène took several turns with her up and down the court-yard, which was still lighted up by the blazing house, and filled with a busy, bustling, animated crowd.

The two friends walked up and down the narrow path between two of the detached wings, and never was a lover's cause pleaded probably in the midst of a scene more confused and stirring and less romantic.

At last, after much eloquence expended on Hélène's part, she obtained permission for Dmitri to renew his suit, if

he should be then so disposed, after the lapse of six months.

"For," said Madame Bereti, "in my position, and at my age, it is not likely that he should really care for me; 'tis a transient feeling he entertains for me—it can be nothing else, I imagine."

"You are proud, Eva Vladimirevna," said Hélène. "By-the-bye, you are Vladimirevna too, as well as my little Capuchon Noir—how is this?"

"I am her sister," replied Eva.

"Her sister! And I told you her history, and you never let me know it!"

"I had not heard all the particulars then, and I was not sure she would like me to tell you of the relationship between us."

"No, but I should think she must

be proud of it! May I tell Dmitri?"

"Yes, if you like," said Madame Bereti, smiling and colouring as she thanked Hélène for the kind interest she took in her welfare, and especially for this singular proof of it, and at such a moment!

"Ah!" said Hélène, "I am sorry, to be sure, for the poor old house. But see, the engines have conquered!—at least, the fire burns lower and lower; it will be soon, I hope, quite extinct. Let us order round the carriage and leave this scene of desolation."

As the family left the paternal mansion, reduced to a spectral ruin, and passed through the sweet woods of Berosivka, they heard the nightingales singing deliciously in the early morning; and most refreshing, after so disturbed

a night, did they find this thrilling, soft "jug-jug," with the chirping of other warblers.

When Anna, at whose house they soon arrived, heard of their adventures, she hastened to give them coffee, cream, and beds, with many an exclamation of surprise and horror, and many a "Thank God!" for their escape, crossing herself repeatedly.

Having rested a few hours, Hélène hastened to Dmitri to make final arrangements for Olègue, and to carry off Tais.

Dmitri was very unwilling to part with the child.

"You see, Hélène Nicolaievna," said he, "that Tais is very delicate—she was not quite well the other day, and I called in the doctor, who said she could

not stand the winter in St. Petersburgh; and that if I could take her abroad, it would be all the better, but I can't do that, you know. I can neither let Ta travel nor leave her."

"I daresay Ta could travel very well," returned Hélène, "but I do not think it necessary. Suppose I should suggest to my father that the children should pass the winter in Germany; or if Tais's health is really so frail, you might leave Ta with me, and take her abroad yourself."

"Perhaps," said Dmitri, brightening, "I had better come and see her in two or three months."

"Yes," said Hélène, "that will be better on all accounts."

And she then told him of her conversation with Madame Bereti.

Dmitri was the more anxious to obtain the hand of the governess, that he might show how superior he was to the paltry considerations of money or birth.

On his expressing this sentiment, "There would be no *mésalliance* at least," said Hélène; and she then informed him of the honourable pedigree of Eva Vladimirevna, telling him she was the sister of the Capuchon Noir.

Having made the necessary arrangements for the reception of her son and his tutor, she hastened the departure of Tais, and brought her quickly to Nadine and Aimée. Hélène herself took the next day an affectionate leave of her Olègue. She went into his room in the early morning whilst he was yet asleep, and, kissing him, wiped away a few

tears, stood for a moment praying beside him, and then went off with her sisters to St. Petersburgh.

On her arrival the General and her husband commended all she had done; the former wrote a few directions to his intendant, gave Hélène *carte-blanche* as regarded her sisters, and placed the management of his estates in the hands of Prince Tolstoi.

The children were quickly established in a good suite of rooms, and their lessons from numerous masters began.

It is not, however, our intention to follow them in their town life just at present; we will therefore return to Anna's dressing-room, where she, Vera, and Svetlana are sitting together in the month of September, employed jointly on a piece of tapestry work.

"What does Hélène say in her letter, Vera, darling?"

"She is very lazy about writing to me," said Anna.

"She wrote to me last week," said Svetlana, "and told me that Dmitri was coming to see how the climate agrees with Tais, and whether it will be necessary to take her abroad. She said that all the three girls were getting on very well, but that she had serious fears of Madame Bereti's health, she was so thin and weak; but I have heard nothing more of her since."

"She tells me," said Vera, "that the doctor said it was the climate that disagreed with Madame Bereti, but that she herself would not believe it, as it never hurt her before, and she did not at all like the idea of leaving Russia—

that just at this moment Dmitri came unexpectedly in, and asked for an interview with the patient; and the result of which is, a most charming winding up—that the widower and the widow are to be married!"

"Married! oh, I am so glad!" cried Svetlana.

"So am I," said Anna—"only she must leave the children."

"No," said Vera, reading on.

"This good Eva Vladimirevna will not hear of leaving Nadine and Aimée, and Dmitri is quite of her opinion. He finds Tais so much improved!

"Perhaps, therefore, he will take them all abroad after the marriage, as Tais and Madame Bereti are both advised to winter in the south, and to try the waters of Ischl next summer; I hope

then, for Olégue's sake, that they will soon return to Dmitri's home. In every case they take the girls with them, which is more than anyone could ask of them; but the one is so fond of Tais, and the other of Nadine and Aimée, that they cannot part.

"These events and anticipations have caused much joyful excitement, as you may well believe; little Aimée has had a slight attack of fever, which she will no doubt soon get over.

"My little pets are all well, except indeed, baby, who has also the same kind of fever as Aimée; so I do not suppose that hers is occasioned by excitement about the marriage!

"Papa writes from Nigni, that he is very well, and delighted with the prospect of his voyage down the Amour

from Irkutsk. He will look at Kazan on his way to take his servants, and to countermand all he had begun doing there. And now farewell; I shall write again as soon as the children are well. Pray go and see my Olègue while Dmitri is away!"

Vera was delighted with the news contained in this letter. She would have Madame Bereti settled quite near to her —that would be so delightful! But in her haste she forgot that they were all going abroad first. Her sisters were scarcely less pleased, and none of them thought much of Aimée and the baby—even after one or two more letters had arrived, still speaking of them as ill. They were, however, very severely ill—so much so, that the marriage had to be put off for some time.

Hélène found her friend's presence a great comfort and support during this severe trial. At length the poor little baby, the centre of the whole house's anxieties during several weeks, rallied —as Aimée had done a little before. She was, nevertheless, extremely weak, and her fever had not entirely left her. When it at length did so, she who had seemed to be less ill than the little Nathalie, did not like her recover promptly. Baby was again gay and blooming before Aimée could leave her bed. Madame Bereti sat beside her night and day, and had the joy of seeing the little girl's mind become more and more turned from earth to heaven, as her body grew weaker.

Vera and her other sisters met often, to compare the accounts they had

received from St. Petersburgh. Dmitri being told by the doctor that Tais must not remain any longer in a sick house, had brought her home; and poor Nadine was then quite without companions—she was not even allowed to be much with Aimée.

Hélène, who was in great distress, Pauline having left her before all these events occurred, felt the absence of all her sisters. Aimée's room became her chief resort, and she often sat by and listened while Eva read to the little girl, or conversed soothingly with her. The priest also came often to pray beside her, and to make her kiss the cross, which indeed she had now learnt really to do. One evening Aimée seemed to wander a little.

"Oh, it is the fête Verte!—the beau-

tiful fête Verte! Trees at every door!—flowers, flowers everywhere! Oh, happy Whitsuntide! Shall we go out and see the branches, and the grass cut for our rooms, Nadine?"

"It is past—the fête Verte is past," answered Eva; "but there are more beautiful flowers than those; and there is the light of the Holy Spirit: even the trees are the trees of heaven, and the light is the light of God's glory!"

"I see, I see!" exclaimed Aimée. "Oh, Hélène! oh, Nadine! come, come see!"

They were already entering her room. "Come," she continued, "and let me kiss you for all—for dear papa, and for Pauline and Vera—oh, I cannot say all!—and Olégue, and all the little ones. And let me come closer to you, Hélène."

Hélène took her in her arms; the child leant forward to kiss Madame Bereti and Nadine.

"Dear Nadine, I shall see mamma first," sighed she; "it is all so lovely!" and she laid her head on her sister's shoulder, and died.

Madame Bereti, after a few minutes, laid her on the bed, and wept bitterly.

It was all over! The little frail body was carefully washed and dressed in white, with flowers; the priest came and murmured prayers beside the unconscious child, whose blessedness had already begun; the tears of her sisters, as she lay placidly smiling, fell abundantly upon her. On the second day she was carried to the church, full dressed, and lying upon her coffin; prayers were then read at intervals, while the bearers

paused. She was at length placed before the iconostase or altar; the deacon, in dark robes, with green belt, now recited litanies; the priest, in yellow and lilac chasuble, officiating at the same time; the pale light of the wax tapers struggled with the broad sunlight; the incense rose in blue clouds into the air, and all who were present bowed low in prayer.

Before this funeral party returned to the house, a telegram was brought to Prince Tolstoi; it was from the heart-broken General, who was already at Irkutsk, to beg that Aimée might be carried to Garasavka, and laid beside her mother. They left her, therefore, in the church, till arrangements could be made for her brothers and brothers-in-law to escort her thither.

Nadine, now that Aimée had for ever passed from her sight, drooped very much; so much indeed, that it was necessary to take every means of occupying and amusing her. A strange subject of interest, however, presented itself. One day, when she and Madame Bereti were driving out together, they saw a crowd assembling round a poor woman, who had been knocked down by a drosky which had driven off. The crowd was not so dense but that Nadine immediately recognized in this unfortunate woman her old governess, Miss Rodney.

Approaching her, they claimed acquaintance with her; took her into their carriage, and asked where they should drive her?

To this question she was reluctant, it

was evident, to give any answer; but being, as it were, compelled to do so, she gave an address in the very cheapest part of the town.

The unhappy woman had received a great shock, and seemed so ill that they did not tell her then of Aimée's death, but took her to her miserable house and put her to bed.

She had no attendant, and everything about her spoke of the greatest wretchedness.

Hélène made inquiries as to how she had fallen into this state, for she had found for her a very good situation, with a family about to travel; but it appeared that she had left them suddenly, through a foolish *coup de tête* at some imaginary offence, and had found herself incapable of earning anything

without a recommendation; so that she had gradually sunk lower and lower, till this accident had occurred, to extinguish her last hopes—for it was evident that the fall, though it did not break any bone, had rendered complete repose indispensable.

Hélène was ready to send for assistance, and Madame Bereti was pleased to see the zeal and tenderness Nadine displayed in visiting and cheering her. During the whole time of her illness she seemed to be rejoiced at the opportunity of showing her attention.

As Miss Rodney recovered, all the family news was by degrees told to her; and the moment she heard of Madame Bereti's marriage, she wrote and offered herself to Hélène as governess to Nadine; and had the assurance to add,

that there being now but one pupil, the labour would not be too much for her.

Hélène sent her the following reply:

"I thank you very much for your kind offer of devoting yourself to Nadine, but I am so selfish for her that I have accepted Madame Bereti's proposal, and shall leave Nadine still under the care that has been so blessed to her, and which she will share with Tais Georgevna. I heard yesterday that the Comtesse Lvoff is going abroad; I enclose a note to her, in case you like to apply to her."

We may as well add, that the Comtesse Lvoff did take Miss Rodney out of Russia, but the family into which she had entered could not endure her temper beyond Geneva, where she re-

mained, and, settling down amid that

"Cold community of yeasty waves,"

Married an unfortunate watchmaker, a martyr to tick.

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed the gossip, Vera's old tormentor, "well, Svetlana Nicolaievna, well, Ivan Petrovitch, fine doings! Did I not foresee it all? Dear, dear, how your fine family has gone to rack and ruin, to be sure! The General in Japan among savages — the old house burnt to the ground—Vera Nicolaievna married—Liubov Nicolaievna with God, heaven rest her soul!—and Nadejda Nicolaievna going abroad for the winter, with Tais Georgevna and the bride and bridegroom forsooth! Dmitri Georgevitch and Eva Vladimirevna married in the grandest style in

St. Petersburgh too!—and the Princess Ida Vladimirevna, can she really be her sister? There, and — the saints have mercy on us! Olègue is to live alone! All is turned upside down!"

"No, no, no," cried Svetlana, as soon as she could speak for laughing, "not everything. Hélène is very happy. Her husband has a new grade, and has bought a beautiful place near Moscow, where Olègue and his tutors will live, and little Ta will go and spend some time with them; at all events, Anna and I shall meet them there next month; and Vera, who is now with me here, will be there for her confinement; and my brother Ivan's marriage to the pretty Issafoich is settled. All these are good tidings. Then the old house has been rebuilt by volunteer

workmen, anxious to retrieve their momentary rebellion and Zenobia's wicked folly. My father has emancipated for ever, with their wives, all who aided in this work, and has given them wages from the moment they applied as volunteers; so that with his schools he has freed a great number. Cemon and Zenobia are married, and live with Vera. Zenobia felt poor dear little Aimée's death dreadfully, and Vera took her into her service to console her.

"It is true that my father is away, but he is well, and has obtained that which he so much desired. Nadine is also absent, but she is with Pauline at Hamburg, which she, Dmitri and Tais all longed to see. She will winter at Nice and return in the spring—so I do not think she is to be pitied, nor Tais

either; and as to Dmitri, he thought he was doing a very wise thing in choosing a wife only for her personal qualities, though he finds that she belongs to an ancient and noble family also, and is in every way a desirable connection.

"Is it not so, Vera?" said she, as her sister entered, a little languidly, but looking more beautiful than ever, leaning on her husband's arm.

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Vera, "she has made everyone's happiness; it was a good day when she came into our family."

"Well, I see you are determined to praise her," said the lady, spitefully.

"I ought," said Vera, bravely, "for I owe her much. And so do we all. When I just think of what we were two years ago, I feel that we can never be thankful enough to her and

to God," added she, reverently crossing herself, and glancing at the cross in the corner of the room before the images.

Svetlana looked earnestly at her sister, whose eyes were sparkling through her tears, and marvelled at this bold, open expression of her thoughts from the retiring little Vera to a person like their visitor.

The latter was no less astonished.

"She has indeed done wonders!" said she, mockingly. "She has made Vera Nicolaievna bold, and Nadejda timid."

"Say rather," remarked Ivan Petrovich, "that she has imparted moral courage to the one, and feminine gentleness to the other."

"And the third," said Svetlana, "dear, dear little Aimée?"

"Is now a happy spirit," said Viat-

cheslav, kissing the tears from Vera's eyelashes. "Who can tell how *she* regards her now?"

THE END.

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